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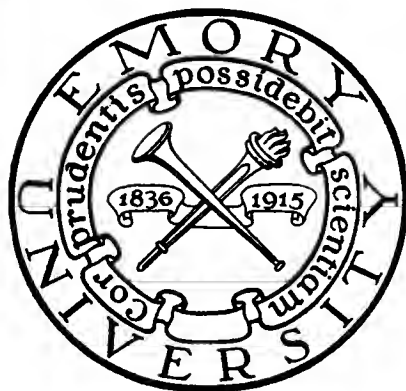
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BROKEN BONDS.

BY
HAWLEY SMART,

AUTHOR OF

“COURTSHIP IN 1720,” “TWO KISSES,” “RACE FOR A WIFE,”
“FALSE CARDS, ETC., ETC.”

“ O fair green girdled mother of mine,
Sea, thou art clothed with the sun and the rain,
Thy sweet hard kisses are strong like wine,
Thy large embraces are keen like pain.
Save me and hide me from all thy waves,
Find me one grave of thy thousand graves.
Those pure cold populous waves of thine,
Wrought without hand in a world without stain.”

NEW EDITION.

WARD, LOCK, BOWDEN, & CO.,
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BROKEN BONDS

CHAPTER I.

THE WISHING-WELL AT UPWAY.



A DELICIOUS June afternoon—one of those first balmy days that give earnest of the summer that is yet to come. Below the crest of a grassy knoll above the little village of Upway recline a youthful couple, lazily feasting their eyes on the panorama that lies unrolled before them. They look over some miles of sparsely-timbered, undulating grass country, which merges at length into the lovely bay of Weymouth. The sun flashes fiercely down on the glittering waters, sprinkled with trim, gaily-decorated little yachts; while ever and anon, leaving a trail of dense black smoke in her wake, comes some steamer from across the channel, with steady, resolute intention, round the eastern extremity of the breakwater. Business-like fellows these steamers, holding a stern, uncompromising course for the harbour, as they wend their way disdainfully through the little sailing-boats that flutter here and there, like swallows o'er a pond.

The faint low line of the outer breakwater is just visible, but the inner and the anchorage of the harbour of refuge are shut out by the promontory that terminates in the Nothe Fort. Redcliffe Point stands boldly out in the sunshine, and the eye stretches away to the eastward, till the land fades hazily away behind the shallow waters of

Kingsted Ledge. To the south-west the picture is closed by the iron-bound rock of Portland, which glowers o'er the smiling waters of Weymouth Roads, like some old world monster.

Island, yet no island—a caprice of nature, this singular headland. Made an island, probably, at the time of that great upheaval which separated Great Britain from the continent, the waters have ever since endeavoured to repair the havoc of the volcanic fires, and by their ceaseless wash have piled up that marvellous natural breakwater called Chesil Beach, which connects the rock with the mainland. There is something very singular to a shrewd observer in walking through the isle. He cannot but recognise that the four or five miles which he has traversed since leaving Weymouth have placed him, in some sense, in a foreign country. The villages of the interior remind one—I am speaking of Reforne, Southwell, etc.—strongly of those of the west of Ireland.

A curious race, these Portlanders—hereditary fishers and smugglers—only now awakening to the march of civilization, and to the knowledge that this latter branch of industry is obsolete, vanished from the earth as a profession, like many other employments of eighty years ago. Only a generation since, and it was no uncommon thing to find a Portlander who knew no other *land* than his native rock. A thrifty, hardy breed, with loose ideas regarding *flotson jetson* and contraband dealing—especially this last, holding that shipwrecks generally were favours vouchsafed of Providence to the people on whose shores they might occur, and drily remarking that they took pattern by their own “Race,” which disgorges with much reluctance what comes within its maw.

The immediate left of the hill of which I first spoke is clothed with a belt of wood, which runs down to a brawling shallow trout-stream, deepening here and there, and notably at the base of this hill, where it has been artificially dammed into a cool, delicious tank, known for miles round that neighbourhood as the “Wishing Well.” The straggling little village of Upway lies scattered along the east bank of the brook, the main body of the hamlet lying, indeed, upon the rising ground on the opposite slope of the

valley, and standing on either side of the high road between Dorchester and Weymouth. But there are many snug creeper-covered cottages and farm-houses nestling on the margin of the streamlet, and a quaint water-mill, showing signs of ripe old age, proves that the inhabitants have been awake to the utilizing of their water-power for generations back.

The pair that sat tranquilly enjoying this summer afternoon are worth looking at. The man, a slight, almost boyish-looking figure of medium height, with soft chestnut hair and silky moustache of the same hue, clear-cut features and sleepy blue eyes—eyes which you could fancy with a light in them, nevertheless, should their owner be roused—feet and hands of almost feminine smallness. He is attired in rough shooting-jacket and knickerbockers, but the strong laced boots fit with remarkable neatness, and his hands are cased in well-fitting dog-skin gloves. A couple of fishing-rods and a basket lie beside him, while with wide-awake tilted over his eyes, he lies dreamily watching the smoke-wreaths of his cigar, and drinking in the gorgeous panorama at his feet. Such is Frank Ellerton, more popularly known as Dainty Ellerton, in the —th Hussars and about town generally—a sobriquet he had attained from his extreme fastidiousness—a popular man with those who understood him, but at times pronounced supercilious by those only slightly acquainted with him. These latter speak in their ignorance; there is really no superciliousness about Dainty, but he shrinks intuitively from coarseness or boisterous manner. His boyish look and somewhat studied dress contribute often to this delusion. In the regiment, albeit he was a prime favourite, they laughingly vowed nobody ever caught Dainty ungloved, except at mess—that he had a fatigue-party expressly to lace those dandy shooting-boots; but those who had walked with him on a hill-side knew well what that slight girlish figure could compass, and how deadly was the breechloader in those kid-gloved hands. You might smile at the coxcombry of his hunting get-up, and put him down as a mere coffee-room sportsman; but those who had seen Dainty “go” in the shires held him in high esteem, and declared no more unflinching horseman

ever crossed the Vale of Belvoir. Despite his youthful appearance, Frank Ellerton has numbered five-and-twenty summers.

His companion is a girl of some twenty years—a bright, sparkling, vivacious brunette, although now her mobile features are still enough. You might have doubts about Jennie Holdershed's beauty, if you first saw her as she is at present; but if you once saw her animated, with her brilliant grey eyes flashing, and her pearly teeth gleaming behind their coral prison, you would quickly recant such heresy, and even then you would have scarcely recognised the great charm of Jennie Holdershed—her frank, free, honest nature. She sits there toying with the ribbon in her hat, and all regardless of the afternoon sun, which glistens through her dusky uncovered tresses. Jennie's brows are knit in somewhat unpleasant thought.

"So this is the last I shall see of you?" she said softly at length.

"Yes, for the present. Leave's up, and England, or at all events, the Horse Guards—same thing, but more practical—expects every man to do his duty," returned Dainty lazily.

"When shall you be down here again?"

"I'm sure I don't know—we never do know what will become of us in twelve months' time in the Army."

"But I suppose you can come here again before long, if you want to," returned the girl, a little sharply.

"No chance of getting leave, unless an elderly relative selects this place to die in. You wouldn't expect me to come down here in the winter, would you?—and I can't get away again before that, except under peculiar circumstances."

"But why not for a few days in the winter?"

"Why not!" exclaimed Dainty, raising himself on his elbow, and regarding his companion with naïve astonishment—"why not!" Why, because it's the hunting season, and nobody ever came down here to hunt who could accomplish it anywhere else."

The girl bit her lips with vexation as she replied:

"I hope something may compel you to come here, whether you will or not."

"Maybe," returned Dainty, "I might be relegated there;" and as he spoke, he pointed laughingly to Portland. "No knowing, Jennie; there's a vein of crime lies dormant in all of us, and my speciality may be developed in due course."

"Nonsense!" she replied, pettishly. "You won't understand me, though you know well enough what I mean."

"You don't mean that you and I are to whip for trout all the year long?" said Dainty, gravely.

"Of course not. Never mind what I mean. Come away now. It's getting late, and you have four miles to walk, you know." And as she spoke the girl rose to her feet.

"Quite true, you practical Jennie," replied Dainty, as he leisurely picked up himself and the fishing-rods. "You've improved a good bit lately, but you strike a little too quick still. Pity I hadn't another week to drill you. Been a pleasant fortnight, too, hasn't it?"

"I have enjoyed it," said the girl quietly, as she led the way to the before-mentioned belt of woodland.

Crossing a low stile, they entered a narrow path beneath the trees, which, in gradual zig-zag fashion, descended the hill until it arrived at the margin of "The Wishing Well."

As they appeared there, a saucy, ragged girl of fifteen emerged from an adjacent cottage, bearing a common tray, on which were a couple of small tumblers.

"Wish, wish, sir!" she cried, with laughing eyes, "whether it be for success with the trout, or success with your sweetheart—for love or for riches, for wealth or for happiness. Drain a bumper to the winning of what lies nearest your heart. Give me sixpence, Captain, and I'll drink a glass myself, to wish that your wish may be granted."

Dainty laughed as he took a tumbler, and, having dipped it in the cool water at his feet, exclaimed:

"A prosperous fishing season; and may you score five brace your next afternoon!"

Jennie acknowledged his wish with a somewhat contemptuous gesture; then, turning sharply upon the attendant Hebe, exclaimed:

"Give me a glass, Nance. Fill it for me, please," she continued, handing it to her companion.

Mutely he complied with her request. Jennie raised the glass steadily to her lips, then pausing, extended her hand and exclaimed :

"I'll say good-bye first, Frank."

"Good-bye," he replied, as their hands met, with no little astonishment visible in his countenance.

"And now mark you my toast. May you want my help sorely, or may I never see you more. Adieu!" and, tossing her tumbler lightly into the well, the girl sped swiftly away.

"And there goes your sixpence after the glass, my bonny man!" cried Nancy, fiercely, suiting the action to the word; "and I'd send you after the two if I could, for crossing her, and she the best friend ever a poor body had in Upway. What led you to thraw her to-night?"

"Upon my soul, I don't know what's annoyed her, you little she-devil!" retorted Dainty, angrily, as he strode away.

The girl stood glowering as she watched him disappear round a turn of the road.

"She-devil!" she muttered, as a malignant scowl overran her elfish face. "I reckon little what they call me, but let those who'd do wrong to Miss Jennie look out while Nance is abroad. She's the only one ever cared for me. Who nursed me through the fever two years ago? Not mother, for she's hard enough work to nurse herself; not father, for he's mostly drunk. I'd 've died then but for Miss Jennie, and I'd put a knife into anybody who wronged her, if I died for it next day!"

Much want of education prevalent in these parts; school-boards or similar institutions not yet got to bear upon the minds of the inhabitants thereof. This young Pagan had constituted Jennie Holdershed her Divinity, and was prepared to institute human sacrifice as a rite of propitiation.

Dainty Ellerton, meanwhile, tramping steadily back to Weymouth, is oppressed with grievous misgivings. He is, despite some little affectations, by no means a coxcomb; still no man, other than imbecile, could have misunderstood Jennie Holdershed's last speech. Now Dainty,

albeit more than one pair of bright eyes have shone kindly upon him during his journey through life, happens to be of a peculiarly unsusceptible temperament. His soft, lazy manner, and utter oblivion of their *agaceries*, made him extremely popular among women, who, from the days of Eve downwards, have ever had a hankering for the fruit that seems out of reach. But no woman yet could say that she had held Frank Ellerton within the toils.

What whim had brought him to Weymouth, is scarce worth inquiry. He had been quartered at Dorchester some two or three years back, and perchance it was curiosity to look upon the old scenes once more—sadder mistake, after long absence, the writer wots not of. The re-visiting of such places, under those circumstances, is usually attended with sadness and disappointment; our fancy conjures up the *beaux moments* of the past; we would fain revive all the old loves and friendships, recall the rosy hours of bygone times. Alas! the links are broken; you can no more galvanize the dead memories of the past into life than you can the dead bodies of the actors in that faint, far-away drama.

If Dainty had not experienced this altogether, yet he had in some measure. Weymouth is not a very stirring place. The poor little watering-place, with one of the most beautiful bays in England, still lies paralysed under the ponderous memories of George the Third. He is like an incubus on the town. They cannot divest themselves of those heavy reminiscences. He permeates the whole neighbourhood, even to defacing an entire down with his gigantic effigy cut out on the soft green turf. You can't escape from that old Conservative monarch; you are always tumbling upon his statue, his house, his hotel, or something of that sort—research might probably discover his sedan-chair. Despite all his descendants have tried to do for Weymouth, Weymouth still remains enveloped in the mantle of George the Third.

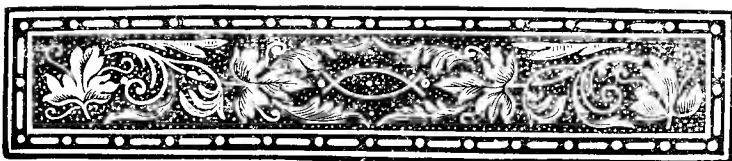
Dainty Ellerton perhaps got a little over-done with George the Third and Weymouth, so he betook himself vigorously to trout-fishing; and it was on his second expedition of the kind that he discovered Jennie Holdershed on the banks of the stream between Upway and Dor-

chester, endeavouring to fill her basket by the aid of—a worm.

To you who fish, no need to describe with what horror a fisherman would view such proceeding. It approximates in some measure to killing foxes with a gun. Dainty didn't weep—hussars don't, except under infinite pressure—but he did, in roundabout gentlemanly language, give Miss Holdershed to understand that he regarded her in the light of a malignant and pestilent poacher.

Jennie's blushing penitence for her unwitting offending so far moved him that he sent for a light trout-rod from London, and commenced to instruct her in the art of fly-fishing. He listened gravely to her protestations that she wanted trout, and knew no other manner of catching them, much as the owner of a breech-loader might give ear to a benighted man who took pheasants with a snare. From that time they met daily, and fished in company, Dainty being by no means complimentary to his fair assistant on her efforts, though she was welcome always to the joint produce of the basket. This partnership had endured rather more than a fortnight previous to the above scene at the "Wishing Well."

"Deuced odd!" mused Dainty, still tramping steadily home to Weymouth. "I've never said anything spoony to her—never said more than that she really would throw a good fly with a little more practice, and here she expects me, at the finish, to be downright sentimental. It's very awkward, very. I'm sure I never meant anything of that sort. But when you see a pretty girl catching trout with a worm, it becomes a duty to talk to her seriously about her misconduct; and when you find it is all ignorance, what's a man to do but teach her how to fish? How was I to guess she would confound fishing with flirtation? I am really sorry about it, too, for she's much too nice a girl to make a fool of, but, on my honour, I never meant this to come of it. Catch me helping a young woman out of a scrape again! How I shall go if I happen to see a riding-habit in difficulties next season!"



CHAPTER II.

CAPTAIN HOLDERSHED.

VERY angry with herself was Jennie Holdershed as she sped rapidly home. She had not meant that her tongue should so much get the better of her, and could have bitten out the offending member as she thought of her "wish." You must not think that frank, warm-hearted, practical Jennie had fallen over head and ears in love with this graceless hussar. Far from it. But she had got rather to like him, much as she often laughed at what she called his "jessamy ways," and she could not help feeling a little piqued at the coolness with which he took their separation, and the quiet indifference he displayed with regard to their meeting again.

"What a fool I made of myself!" thought Jennie, as she arrived at the door of her uncle's cottage. "But he knew his dragoon impertinence always did 'rise me,' as he calls it, and he might have refrained from putting it on the last day. He might have said he hoped we should meet again ere long. He might have suggested in some shape when that was likely to be, instead of saying good-bye, as if we were to meet out fishing in a day or two. I hate people who say good-bye as if they never cared whether they were to see you again or not. My word," she continued, laughing, as a deep bass voice met her ear—storming in somewhat unorthodox language, "the barometer's down to heavy wet and squally."

Captain Holdershed was a retired merchant skipper,

who, bred a Portland fisherman, had by ~~any~~ or sheer hard work arrived in due course at the dignity of commanding a trader. A very lumbering affair was the old tub of a brig first committed to his charge; but when, some six or seven years ago, having amassed a competency, he told the firm he served that "he would go to sea no more," he resigned the command of one of the handsomest clippers in the China trade.

Retirement, I regret to say, had not been conducive to the old sailor's respectability. While at sea he had been justly esteemed as a remarkably sober, steady, and trustworthy officer; on shore, sad to tell, he was a most boisterous bibulous old gentleman. He held, with the toper mentioned in the old Greek poet,

"the rule I think is right,
Not absolutely drunk, nor sober quite,"

and spent his days in this doubtful condition. He roamed about clad in a suit of pilot cloth, and, as Mr. Carlyle says of the old Brandenburg barons, 'mind also cased in ill habits of long continuance.' He never varied this costume, but in the heats of summer carried his coat over his shoulder, and confronted Upway genially in his shirtsleeves. That such a man would always have a telescope under his arm, I need scarcely observe; and marvellous were the sights that, inspired by the stimulants he so copiously resorted to, the ancient mariner saw through that glass. He swore, and in strong, strange, sea-faring oaths too, that the fellow of that glass had never been seen. Very intimate friends, to whom he occasionally accorded the privilege of putting it to their eyes, had been heard to remark that its fellow would not command a very high price as telescopes went, if it were. But then, as Captain Holdershed observed, "There's a great deal in a man knowing his own glass." To which one of his cronies, with similar convivial tendencies, replied, "And so there is. It stamps a man a gentleman late in the evening!" However, you can't always shoot with another man's gun, the same spectacles don't suit all shortsighted people, and it may be that that

telescope was adapted only to the vision of Captain Holdershed; certain it is that no one ever saw the sights he did through it, or, indeed, for the matter of that, through any other glass.

Jennie Holdershed was the daughter of a tolerably well-to-do farmer in Portland. Farmers there are very different from their more wealthy brethren in England's great agricultural districts. The holdings are much smaller, scientific culture of the land unknown, and those who practise the craft on that, one may say, rocky isle, wring their living from the sterile soil in somewhat primitive fashion. Portland mutton is celebrated, but the yeomen of Hampshire, or the stalwart breeders of the long-wool sheep of Lincolnshire and Norfolk, would turn their noses contemptuously up at the wild, goat-like-looking flocks of Portland.

A hard-working, close-fisted man was John Holdershed; and when his brother, the Captain, some time after his settling down at Upway, complained bitterly that he had no one to keep house for him, John Holdershed, with a keen eye to the ultimate disposition of Uncle Robert's savings, suggested that his second daughter Jennie, should fill that situation. Uncle Robert was very fond of his niece, and jumped eagerly at the idea. And so it came about that, some three years ago, Jennie was installed as housekeeper at the Upway cottage.

Bright bonny Jennie had led a life wild as a seamew nearly up to that. She could steer, trim a sail, catch mackerel by the score, or, at need, handle an oar very decently. From her earliest girlhood she had been accustomed to accompany her brothers on their fishing excursions, and brothers are somewhat intolerant of little sisters on such occasions, unless they make themselves useful. But Willie and Launce vowed that, unless it came to real hard rowing, Jennie was as good in the boat as themselves. Willie and the eldest girl, Mary, still remained at home, and helped their parents with the farm, while Launce held a situation as gamekeeper some fifteen miles away.

Such, briefly, is the history of the Holdersheds. There is nothing further to mention concerning them than that

they had been settled at Portland for generations, and that the farm had been transmitted steadily from father to son.

Jennie had great influence with her uncle, and had she been old enough to have taken her place at Upway some three or four years sooner, might have controlled that gallant veteran's bibulous propensities. But when she assumed the reins there the habit was too pronounced, and Jennie knew now that, whatever she might manage on other points, the regulation of her uncle's "nor'-westers," as he termed them, was in great measure beyond her.

Jennie paused at the door a moment to listen to her uncle's fine racy vituperation of the maid on the subject of hot water. Apparently that essential to the old gentleman's comfort was not forthcoming.

"Goodness!" muttered Jennie to herself, "he can't want hot nor'-westers on a June evening like this!"

But it seemed he not only could, but did, and was raging like a cyclone because they were unattainable.

"Uncle, uncle!" she cried, "what is the matter? Pray don't make such a noise. They'll hear you all over the village."

"And what do I care if they do, you hussy?" replied the Captain, though in considerably modulated tones. "It's enough to make a man angry not to be able to get a glass of hot grog in his own house before sundown."

"You've no business to want one before sundown," retorted Jennie, sharply.

"Don't argue, girl. I know best what suits my constitution. I've got a chill to-day."

If he had, the Captain had been rather fortunate, inasmuch as that desiderated coolness had been scarcely achieved by any one else in those parts; and if he did understand his own constitution; he was most assuredly constituted somewhat differently from his fellows.

"Well, don't storm, and you shall have what you want directly. What kettle do you think would boil with you raving at it like that? Kettles, like fish, my uncle, won't stand being sworn at. The kettle that's cursed never sings."

"Well, I won't. It's all right, Jennie, now you've

come home, but that" (vivid Anglo-Saxon expletive here) "maid never does do anything she ought to do.

"She's a very good girl, uncle, only you frighten her with your shocking language, and little blame to her. I'm sure, though you don't mean half what you say, you terrify me at times."

"Well, I don't mean it; it's only my way. Don't be snappish, Jennie, and never mind the kettle till after supper," replied the Captain somewhat sheepishly.

His niece kept him in very tolerable order, although not altogether able to suppress the "nor'-westers." When he waxed very mutinous, she threatened to resign the keys and return home. That menace invariably brought the old gentleman to his bearings. He was quite aware that his niece's presence contributed in no small measure to his domestic comforts; add to which he was honestly and genuinely attached to her.

"Fish for supper, uncle!" cried the girl, gaily tapping her basket. "It was a very bad day, but we did get a few—more Mr. Ellerton's doings than mine, though. I only killed one the whole afternoon."

"Ah!" said the Captain, sententiously, "you should have been after mackerel. I walked up to the top of the hill, and through my glass saw some chaps pulling 'em in by dozens at the opening of the breakwater."

There was no impossibility about this simple statement; still what the Captain really had seen was some people fishing, apparently, at the place mentioned, but with what success he was too far off to ascertain. But the Captain was not one of those who allow their narratives to flag in interest from want of colour or incident. He possessed considerable power of embellishment, and having ascertained, with the aid of that invaluable glass, as much as possible of his neighbours' affairs, never scrupled to fill in the details from the stores of his imagination. There was no harm in supposing that those mackerel-fishers had a good day; but the bibulous old mariner quite believed that he had seen what he narrated.

"It was Mr. Ellerton's last day," said Jennie, as she flitted about, making preparations for their evening meal.

A bystander could hardly have failed to have been struck with the girl's ways. She was peculiarly rapid and graceful in her movements, very quick of gesticulation, and had a quaint, positive nod of her head, both in negation, and assertion, and even in expostulation, that was all her own. Her rich, dusky hair lay coiled close round her well-turned head, and in its wealth scorned the adventitious assistance of chignon or locks of perjury. That, after all, was her charm—she was so genuine. You couldn't have lied to Jennie Holdershed, if you had any manhood left in you. Every feeling of pleasure, pain, scorn, or anger was so plainly visible in that frank, honest face that I pity the man who could have dared run the chance of seeing those grey eyes flash with contempt at his meanness or lack of veracity. If you had asked Jennie, she would have told you that cowardice was the root of all evil—that it was cowardice made people for most part liars, impostors, or lowminded. She ranked the virtue of courage very highly, but then she took a very comprehensive view of courage. She looked upon it as not merely a contempt of physical danger, but equally as the despising of social and moral weaknesses. Bold and fearless herself, she held in little esteem those who shrank from confronting public opinion, and would have faced her own little world on a question of social polity as unflinchingly as she would have braved a heavy gale off "The Bill" in her brother's boat. That a man could lack physical courage altogether would scarcely enter into Jennie's understanding; but she did know that some men were cooler, prompter, and apter to meet the exigencies of danger than others, and Jennie held them in high regard.

Dainty Ellerton had been a great problem to Jenny on their first meeting. He was of a species she had not yet encountered in her life. He had made acquaintance with her, as before narrated, in cool, easy, courteous fashion, and Jennie was certainly much impressed with the way he killed trout. His unconcealed contempt for her way of angling, mixed with the most respectful recognition of her bonnie self, had puzzled Jennie to start with. During their fishing *camaraderie* he never vouchsafed her a com-

pliment—indeed, in the latter stage of their intimacy, upon the occasion of a good trout proving too much for her skill, he, in the excitement of the moment, stigmatized her as “a little duffer.” True, he rendered prompt apology for the opprobrious epithet, and Jennie had only laughed merrily at it, and exclaimed “she feared she was.” Still Jennie had owned to herself that there was something very pleasant in Dainty’s easy, polished talk.

He had seen a good deal of the world, and, further, was a man of more than average ability and education. The refinement of his manner had a charm for the girl, who, though unconscious of that attribute herself, had been endowed with it by nature. That common mother of us all does so sometimes fashion the clay she moulds regardless of its surroundings. You meet at times refinement in the cottage, that, like the straws embedded in the amber, puzzles you. You meet also occasionally vulgarity in the *salon*, which does not astonish you so much.

“The things, we know, are neither rich nor rare,
But wonder how the devil they got there.”

But Jennie, whose ideal of man was based considerably upon “great physique,” who dreamt that a man, to realize her conception of the heroic, must be of thews and inches, had conceived a sort of womanly pity for her smooth-faced, almost girlish-looking companion. She liked him; she recognised his skill with a rod; she laughed at his jessamy ways, and taunted him about his gloved hands. Had she been called upon to fancy herself in danger or difficulty with him, she would have felt that it behoved her to think and do for the two of them. Yet only two days before the opening of this story, Jennie had been compelled to change her opinion. The incident was slight—no manhood, perhaps, wanted to confront the danger; and yet there are plenty of men who don’t much care about facing a really savage dog. They were making a short cut towards home from the river, and their way led them through a farmyard, when suddenly, with fierce angry bark, a gaunt half-bred sheep-dog barred their progress. There was small doubt of his evident intent.

With gleaming teeth, erect bristles, and fell glittering eyes, he stood growling in their path.

"For God's sake stand back, Jennie!" exclaimed Dainty sharply; "this brute's vicious. Let me talk to him," and he advanced boldly on his adversary.

For a second or two the beast seemed undecided, and then flew at his assailant. It all took place so quickly, that Jennie never quite made out what did happen; but it seemed to her that a ready foot and a quick sweep of the butt of a fishing-rod met the dog's charge, and rolled him over. Ere he recovered himself, a kid-gloved hand gripped him by the throat, and the butt of the fishing-rod rained down a shower of heavy blows. A few seconds more, and with a well-directed kick to start him, the brute limped howling away.

Nothing much in this, and yet Jennie Holdershed viewed Dainty in quite another light from that moment. If she had thought Frank Ellerton a somewhat effeminate coxcomb before, she never held him in that light again. As I have already said, she was by no means in love with him, but she did now both like and esteem him—foundation, I take it, of most love worth the winning.

"Going away, that Ellerton lad, is he?" said the Captain. "Well, Jennie, he taught you to fish, there's no denying—that is, as far as this gim-crack fresh-water business goes; but it must be fiddling work, girl, for one who has pulled up her mackerel off 'The Shambles,' and seen 'The Race' boil and bubble in its wrath. I don't think much of him myself; I don't hold a chap a man who is so afraid of getting his hands sunburnt."

"If you'd seen him take that brute of a dog by the throat the other night, you'd not say that of him."

"Well, well, I don't fancy either him or his dandy ways," growled the Captain. "Why, — his impudence! when I offered to mix him a nor'-wester myself the other day, he replied 'twas seldom he troubled brandy before dinner. He's a milk-and-water sort."

Dainty could hardly have passed a greater affront on the bibulous old mariner. It was the refusal of bread and salt in the veteran's eyes. He had deemed himself conferring a mark of signal favour, and, behold! it was

curtly rejected. He had regarded Frank Ellerton with much distaste ever since.

"It would be a good deal better if some other people never troubled brandy before dinner," laughed Jennie, emphasizing her remark with a quick little nod. "But come along—supper's ready now."





CHAPTER III.

MR. LAROOM.

ROLF LAROOM, of the well-known City firm, "Ellerton, Son, and Co.," lived in Manchester Square. The houses in that locality bear a generally dingy and mildewed appearance externally, but there is plenty of comfort connected with the interior of some of them. There was probably not a domicile in those parts more luxuriously fitted up than the home of Rolf Laroom. A quiet, decorous, steady-going business man was Laroom, in the eyes of most of his associates, rather given to a good dinner, and keenly appreciative of a good glass of wine, but still a middle-aged respectable bachelor, who attended morning service with undeviating punctiliousness as the Sunday came round, subscribed handsomely to many charities, dressed decently, and as befitted his age and calling. Bland of manner, and smooth of tongue, Mr. Laroom was a popular man in his circle. See him now, as he sits over his wine, all alone in his cosily-furnished dining-room. A rather portly man of five-and-forty, or thereabouts, dark in complexion, hair somewhat thin at the top, large heavy eye, fleshy chin, and full, sensuous mouth.

Ah! what stories these mouths tell to the physiologist! It is the feature of the face, the *one* that never lies. People lay great stress on the eye, but nervousness will sometimes occasion most erroneous impressions based upon such foundation; there *are* eyes, too, that you never

see—no possibility of getting a direct look into them. But the mouth—neither man nor woman can mask that. If it was ever your misfortune to see intelligence of great trouble told to any one, it was in their lips you read the anguish. Some people there are who have tears always at command, but when you see the lips blanch, writhe, or quiver, then be assured that the iron has entered into the soul—that marks the first shivering of the nerves. There are those who cultivate lachrymation as one does languages or music. When the fountains be near the surface, depend upon it there is little sincerity or purity in the waters. One would scarce care to be wailed by eyes that moistened as readily at the misfortunes of a blackbird as at our own.

Mr. Laroom's mouth told no falsehood. When you see an eminently respectable man, with sensuous lips like these, ostentatiously proclaiming his charity and righteousness to the world, depend upon it that he is masking, not stifling, the offending Adam—that he has a second history in the background. At all events, Rolf Laroom had. That specious hypocrite was proprietor of a small luxurious villa down by Teddington, of which the world wotted not, and concerning which it will be necessary to make no further allusion. There was need just to mention this fact, in order to arrive at a proper understanding of the man's character; for, as will be seen, he is the prominent motive power in the story I am about to narrate. That a man of this secret sensual disposition requires ever money for the prosecution of his vices is, of course, obvious, when we understand Rolf Laroom's second history. Junior partner in the wealthy firm of Ellerton and Son, to the uninitiated he would appear to be living well within his income. But take into consideration this other side of his life, and it can be easily imagined that Laroom was a necessitous man.

Yet it was not so. Laroom had many more irons in the fire than Ellerton and Son dreamed, and made money in ways they had little idea of. Moreover, the man was calculating even in his pleasures, and if he at times spent money freely, still did so far from recklessly—a *quid pro quo* invariably governed him upon such occasions, and he

would estimate whether the game was worth the candle as deliberately as if embarking in a fresh speculation. Not a pleasant disposition this; moreover, it was a jealous, indictive, unscrupulous one to boot—keen to take offence, antiring in animosity when provoked, very sensitive to what he deemed a slight put upon him, wincing much at any allusion to his lowly extraction. He is a Polish Jew by birth, and entered the firm as clerk—risen from that to the position he now occupied by virtue of much talent for business, and the gift of foreign tongues; a cruel, coarse, sensual brute when you got through the veneer of him.

Ellerton and Son consisted in these days simply of Maurice Ellerton (elder brother to that hussar with whom we have already made acquaintance) and this Rolf Laroom. The Ellertons were of good family; the grandfather of the present generation, founder of the house, had been a younger son, and, like most of that fraternity, had discovered upon entering life that it behoved him to find butter for his bread. His allowance might keep him in bread and cheese, but if he had a hankering for baked meats and other luxuries of this life, then it was necessary that his own brains should supply the requisite increase of income. He was no fool, and recognising betimes a fact of which the higher ranks of British society are now thoroughly aware, he decided that money was more quickly attained in business than in what are termed the professions—felt, indeed, no speciality for any of these last, but much capability of money-making, did he once get a start. He succeeded, married also with a tolerable eye for the world's gear, and died leaving a prosperous and lucrative business to his son. He, in his turn, if not gifted quite with his father's aptitude in such matters, also did well; and when Maurice, on attaining his majority, entered the house as junior, Ellerton and Son was a thriving business. But some three or four years afterwards, the health of Ellerton senior began to fail, and he was compelled to withdraw gradually from all active participation in the affairs of the firm.

Then it was that Maurice, a naturally indolent man, and with a craving to enjoy some little of the poetry of life, of which, sad to say, there is little in the art of money-

getting, essential as its possession is, nevertheless, to due enjoyment of that poetry, chafed at his collar, and by way of obtaining relief cast about for a partner. Rolf Laroom, then one of the senior clerks, attracted his attention by his energy and shrewdness, and so it came about that, seven years before this story commences, Laroom became the junior and working partner in Ellerton and Son.

As he grew weaker and weaker, Mr. Ellerton interfered less and less in the business affairs of the firm, and for the last three years of his life never set foot in the counting-house, leaving matters entirely to the management of Maurice and Mr. Laroom, such papers as his signature was essential to being brought to him at his private residence. Barely two years back, and death had relieved him of his infirmities, and leaving a well-secured jointure to his wife, a comfortable younger son's position to Dainty, and the business to Maurice, Francis Ellerton was borne to the sepulchre of his fathers.

Glance once more at this Laroom, as he sits in that well-curtained, brilliantly-lighted dining-room sipping his Burgundy—strong, vigorous wine, such as men of his temperament love dearly while their constitutions admit of it—one who by innate disposition could never prefer

“The lilies and languors of virtue
To the raptures and roses of vice.”

There are men born constitutionally wicked, and this was one.

He is looking at a small carte-de-visite—an ordinary shilling photograph—the likeness of a bright, sunny young face, with a great touch of sauciness and petulance in the expression. What may be the complexion that carte says not. The sun, if he be a good portrait-painter, tells us nothing upon that point. Whether the hair be blue-black or golden, whether the eyes are blue as heaven or dusk as night, he leaves to our wild imaginings. But in this case, whether blonde or brunette, you would say the original was a sweet, pretty girl.

“Yes,” he muttered at length, “our day of reckoning

draws near. A little while longer and you will shed salt tears that ever you laughed at Rolf Laroom. The tables are turned, my mistress, and, next time I whisper love to you, you'll deem me no fit butt for a girl's petulant scorn. I shall be spared jeers at my origin then, I fancy, nor have my kiss so fiercely resented. Yes, I would give much to have you on your knees, and to hear you falter forth your consent to be Rolf Laroom's wife. And that is the price you must pay for my forbearance. Ah! well, a little longer, and we shall see." And he rose and tossed the photograph into an open despatch-box that stood near at hand.

He stood for some moments gazing into the fireplace, then, facing about, thrust his hands into his pockets and continued his meditations. He looks back upon a summer's day, and a bright garden scene full of gay colouring; the flower beds all on fire, if one may use the expression, with every hue of the rainbow. A trim, fairy-like figure, with chestnut tresses, and deep blue eyes, dancing with fun, flits before him in light, delicate muslin robe and coquettish straw hat. She always treats him with much courtesy, as the esteemed friend of her guardian. She is young enough to be his daughter—a capricious, saucy, petted child, verging on seventeen; but she flirts with him in a jesting way, and he contracts such passion for her as his earthy, sensual clay is capable of.

It is not his first visit, nor the first time she has flirted with him in light sportive fashion—putting a flower in his coat, ordering him about in dainty, authoritative manner; giving him, with a saucy smile and monitory forefinger, her hat, parasol, or what not, to take care of. The subtle intoxication steals into his veins. We know what views men of this lower organization take of love; such love as this man was capable of he had contracted for his fairy-like guide. She took him to the strawberry-beds, and made him foray therein for her delectation. Then she said he deserved some reward for his labours. She selected a very large strawberry from the leaf-full he had gathered for her, and offered to put it into his mouth. He remembered now how his head whirled, and snatching the little hand within his own, he covered it with kisses.

A fierce cry of indignation, a short, very short struggle and her hand is extricated, and she regards him with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes.

"How dare you!" she cried, drawing her *petite figure* up to its full height, and ostentatiously wiping her hand with her handkerchief. "Dainty's right—one should never trust an underbred one. When one knows a man is not born a gentleman, one should be more cautious. I have committed a great mistake, sir!"

But the fierce, sullen blood was surging in his veins; all his brutal instinct was roused by her scorn.

"You have," he cried, "if you think to treat me as a love-sick boy!" And ere she comprehended his intent, he clasped her in his arms and pressed some half-dozen passionate kisses on her cheeks.

When he released her, she stood flushed and shaking literally from head to foot—with fright, as he imagined. He was wrong—it was with anger. Her next movement was sudden as his own had been.

"Coward!" she hissed between her little white teeth; and, gliding like lightning to his side, she smote him with clenched fist in the face with all her force. "There's a receipt for your kisses. I must away home to cleanse my cheeks now." And she sped back to the house.

She had struck to some purpose, for his lip was bleeding, and in lieu of every drop that trickled from the wound he imbibed a fierce drop of rancorous hatred towards the girl he professed to love. He swore that she should pay dearly for her scorn, and that he strove hard to keep his oath we shall see. Should she ever be at this man's mercy it is like to go hard with her.

And, she, too it is scarce probable will forget that afternoon. One of her many rings is broken, and two of her delicate fingers sorely cut she finds, as, trembling all over with indignation and excitement, she regains her own room. She will not tell her guardian, she thinks, of the insult that has been passed upon her. It might be awkward and troublesome for him. She has a gallant spirit of her own, this child of seventeen, and she fancies, not without warrant, that Rolf Laroom will trouble her no more. She is so far right that he rarely crosses her path

afterwards, and then only with distant and respectful bow, which she as distantly and most haughtily acknowledges.

Such was the love-passage upon which Mr. Laroom brooded this night so sullenly—not quite one of those golden hours that the most cynical of us can but look regretfully back upon. Men of Laroom's stamp, indeed, can have few love-dreams to recall with satisfaction. Such earthly passions as they contract are best buried in oblivion.

Mr. Laroom, standing with his back to the empty grate, thinks that he is rapidly approaching the fructification of certain schemes that have occupied him these four years past—the date that of his fatuous strawberry-picking, and subsequent loss of command. He smiles as he pictures that delicate little figure kneeling to him, and, while the tears roll down her fresh, fair cheeks, imploring him to save all she loves from ruin. He pictures in his own mind that sweet face, turned up flushed and tear-stained to his own, pleading to him for forbearance. He sees, with unctuous, vindictive chuckle, the shiver that runs through her frame as he names triumphantly the price at which he will stay his hand. What will she, who so scornfully rejected his kiss once, say then? He sees her cowering in the dust, as she entreats that her eternal gratitude may be his recompense. He pictures her, with a flash of her old spirit, demanding fiercely whether he is base enough to take to wife a hand that has spurned him, a heart that bears no love for him. He conjures up all this scene with intense satisfaction. He has toiled for it, plotted for it, lied for it these four years, and the coarse, sensual lips wreath with satisfaction at the idea of the vengeance he is about to take upon a girl for her righteous indignation at his unwarranted presumption.

But the play is not played out yet, and perchance that final scene Mr. Laroom so glories over is not destined to be enacted. The original of that photograph may prove of tougher material than he deems her. Quite possible, too, that her friends may scorn to accept safety at such a sacrifice; that, albeit they know not the hidden side of Mr. Laroom's character, they may have more manhood than

to purchase their salvation by pressing an unwilling girl to the altar.

This view of the case was infinitely above Mr. Laroom's comprehension. He could not call to mind the man, or woman either, that he would hesitate to sacrifice, should his interests require it.





CHAPTER IV.

THE ORIGINAL OF THE PHOTOGRAPH.

WE are proud of our homes, we English. We are wont, and with some justice, to glorify the Englishman's fireside. It is a pretty, if poetical, idea, that sweet sanctity of the domestic hearth, that even if never achieved is, at all events, believed in by quite four-fifths of the women of England; and those that do not believe in it, although doubtless most estimable women, with *tendencies* towards the amelioration of their sex, political *reform*, dress, *rouge-et-noir*, and interchangeable flirtation (pardon the word, but the kind I mean are really all of one pattern), are not the fraction that the best wives are won from, be their station what it may. I am afraid this laudation of our Lares and Penates is somewhat overdone. I am cognizant of firesides where they yawn; I have been a favoured guest at a hearth where they quarrelled continuously; and there are houses in which, when the head of the family should snore, you are expected to speak with bated breath, or turn your newspaper as if in the reading-room of the Amalgamated Veterans' Club—an institution in which, as we all know, it is treason to make any but bronchial or sternutatory noises. Still there are bright firesides in this England of ours all the same, and very pleasant to look back upon are the hours that we have sauntered through by such.

We are about to look in upon as bright a family circle as can be well pictured. Scene of this picture, a hand-

some, well-furnished house in Portland Place; the windows of the drawing-room are open, to admit as much as possible of the warm summer air. On the sofa is seated a handsome elderly lady, who has reckoned at least half a century. Such a sweet face, too, with a delicate bloom on the cheeks even yet, although the hair is shot with silver—soft grey hair, almost as luxuriant as when she stood a blushing bride at the altar, a little more than thirty years ago, and she retains still the figure of her youth. As one looks at the clean-chiselled features and tender blue eyes, one realizes where Dainty Ellerton derived his girlish face and somewhat feminine manner. For this is his mother we are looking at, and, like many another younger son, Dainty is still, and has ever been, that mother's darling. One of those sweet, sympathizing faces that are, thank heaven! not so rare quite as some people deem them—a woman, if you knew her, to whom you would turn irresistibly in time of trouble—a woman, too, who would have listened to your story with tears standing in her still luminous eyes, and then poured such balm into your bleeding wounds as only women of her type are capable of.

Little wonder this woman was adored by her sons. They were but two; no better men, perchance, than hundreds you will meet with in your journey through life—one of them, indeed, as we shall see, sad to say, infinitely worse. But on one point they did agree—very sacred to them both was the name of mother.

No great charge to be preferred against either of them as yet. Dainty, 'twas true, after the manner of hussars, had succeeded in "going" what he termed "a mucker," but his offending was of no greater magnitude than the falling into that old-established military error, peculiarly noticeable in the Brigade and Light Cavalry—to wit, "the spending half-a-crown out of sixpence a day." But Maurice Ellerton had come gallantly to the rescue. If they made little parade of it, strong were the bonds of love and amity that knit those brothers.

Maurice Ellerton lounges in an easy-chair opposite his mother, lazily skimming the leaves of a periodical. He is taller than Dainty, with a frank, honest face, but, to a

keen observer, marked with a slight want of decision ; the mouth in particular shows signs of infirmity of purpose. A well-looking man, just the wrong side of thirty, neat in his dress, but by no means the dandy that his hussar brother is.

The tea is as yet not poured out, and stands upon the table, while from the inner drawing-room rings out a clear, fresh contralto voice, and some of Auber's delicious music floods the room.

Mrs. Ellerton drops the embroidery work she is engaged upon, Maurice lets the magazine fall unheeded to the floor, and still through the room floats the plaintive melody. A pause, a crash on the keys, and the sweet, but now defiant tones, change into the trumpet-voiced "Marseillaise." Another crash of the keys, and the singer is warbling the "Land of the Leal," as if her heart was breaking.

"Come away, child," cries Mrs. Ellerton, "come away. Do you want to send us to bed with tears in our eyes, and no tea ? Rosie, you little democrat, come here and attend to the tea-table ?"

"Ah ! my mother, I know you well. It is requisite to melt you after I have developed my innate Republicanism. I get scolded otherwise."

The speaker paused, laughing, in the folding doors that separated the two rooms. A little fairy-like figure, her head crowned with masses of chestnut hair. The prominent traits that first riveted your attention in the fair, saucy face, were the deep-blue liquid eyes and the *mutine* mouth—original of that photograph that Rolf Laroom had mused so bitterly over.

"So you want your tea, mother, do you ?" she continued, gliding swiftly to the table. "Why didn't you call me before, and not allow me to go on maundering over what that irreverent Dainty calls my musical box. Ah ! and there's Maurice, too, grown sick of my singing. How rude of you, sir !" she continued, with a little pout, as she busied herself about the tea-cups.

"No, Rosie," said Mrs. Ellerton, smiling, "I don't think that is quite the case. Few people enjoy your singing more than we do."

"Yes, you, mother. You know it's your bounden duty to enjoy what pleases any of us, and so we impose upon you to your immense delight to unlimited extent. But Maurice there—how dare you feel bored when I was singing? If I'm snubbed by Dainty, recollect he does it for the family, and I'll submit to it from no one else."

Maurice's only reply was a lazy smile, as she handed him his tea, and a quiet—

"You know I enjoy your singing always, Rosie."

"There it is, my mother," laughed the girl, as she seated herself on a low stool at Mrs. Ellerton's feet. "He's one of the advanced thinkers. He's succumbed already to female agitation. He recognizes how clever we are. He'd paraphrase Kingsley's line to me this minute if he dared. If it wasn't that he is afraid I'd throw lumps of sugar at him, he'd spout solemnly:

' Women must work,
While men they sleep,
So an end to political groaning.'

Thank goodness, my lord," she continued, playfully, "we have not quite arrived at that quandary yet. And if you don't come and turn over my music for me to-morrow, I'll sing you no songs."

"Very lazy of him, Rosie, was it not?" said Mrs. Ellerton, as she fondled the chestnut locks now deposited in her lap.

"Lazy, mother!" cried the girl, her eyes dancing with mirth; "it was worse," and as she spoke the *riante* face assumed an expression of mock solemnity indescribably ludicrous—"it was demoralizing."

"Hold your tongue, you little torment!" cried Maurice, laughing, "or I'll carry you by force to the piano, and make you play the Annen Polka for the next two hours."

"That's the tune they came out of the Ark to, isn't it?" retorted Rosie, nibbling a bit of bread and butter. "You rude old monster, I believe you were there and heard it!"

"Send her to bed, mother; she's getting past bearing to-night," cried Maurice Ellerton, laughing. "When she nestles into your petticoats in that manner, and you give

her, as you are doing this minute, encouraging pats on the head, I have always noticed a bad attack of impudence supervenes."

The girl bounded to her feet with a ringing laugh.

"Wretch!" she exclaimed, "if it wasn't unladylike, mother's presence should not prevent my avenging myself! I should bury my scissors in your shirt-front if I wasn't afraid of the police and dark cells—especially dark cells," she continued, with a little shrug of her shoulders. "We like warmth and sunshine, my mother, do we not?" and Rosie suddenly pressed her pouting lips on Mrs. Ellerton's cheek.

"Yes, little saucebox. Go and sit down. What a tease it is!" But the loving look that followed the girl as she tripped across to the table showed that such teasing was very sweet to her.

Although Rosie Fielding calls Mrs. Ellerton mother, the latter is in reality only her aunt; still she is the sole mother the girl has ever known. Mrs. Fielding died fifteen months after her marriage, when Rosie was but a few weeks old, and it was to the great, loving heart of his sister-in-law that the bereaved husband confided his infant daughter. She grew up the pet and plaything of Mrs. Ellerton's two sons, and as she approached womanhood, tyrannized over them in her own fitful, arbitrary fashion. But there was a considerable difference in the way they bore it. While Maurice was ever her slave, and, though some dozen years her senior, always ready to abandon his own occupation to humour her childish caprices, Dainty constantly treated her commands with contemptuous indifference—did, indeed, upon occasion, box her ears sharply for interfering with or traversing his boyish machinations.

The consequence of this is obvious. The younger brother stood much higher in Miss Fielding's estimation than the elder. She loved them both very dearly, but it was with the delicate distinction that, whereas she loved Maurice in good, honest, sisterly manner, her affection for Dainty had a strong cousinly taint in it. There are cousins and cousins—those that hate and those that love; but the cousinly sentiment, as we all know, is always liable

to ripen into something warmer. I don't mean to say that it had at present—nothing of the sort. Rosie herself could not have explained how it was that she regarded them with dissimilar affection, and yet she was dimly conscious that she did do so. She would probably have replied, could you have questioned her upon the subject:

“Well, you see, they are different, and I suppose that's the reason I don't quite love them both in the same way.”

When Rosie was about ten years old, Mr. Fielding also crossed the “Lonesome Bridge, which, with its golden gates, spans the River of Moaning,” and followed his beloved wife to the “land of the leal.” Rosie was left a very considerable heiress, and Maurice Ellerton and his father were named as her trustees. Ellerton senior has now been dead two years, and Maurice consequently is left sole trustee of Rose Fielding's fortune. This is enough, for the present, to enable the reader to understand Miss Fielding's position in the Ellerton family.

Suddenly a sharp, authoritative rattle of the knocker causes the inmates of the drawing-room to lift their heads in mute astonishment. A light, quick foot on the stairs followed the opening of the door, and Rosie has barely time to ejaculate, “Why, it's Dainty I do believe!” ere that young gentleman presents himself.

The mother's delicate cheeks flush, and her eyes glisten, as that scapegrace dragoon stoops down and kisses her. She loves her eldest son passing well, and very dear to her is Rosie, but the whole weath of her deep, loving heart has been reserved for that youngest son, and he knows it. Albeit he is not much given to sentiment, and far from demonstrative in a general way, yet Dainty always makes much of his mother.

He nods pleasantly to his brother, shakes hands with Rosie, and then exclaims:

“I am awfully hungry, and have told Benson to send a tray up here with whatever they can scramble up quick. Shocking desecration of your drawing-room, mother, but I can't eat downstairs by myself, and am not going to bother you all to come down.”

“Nonsense, Dainty,” replied Mrs. Ellerton; “I must go and see about something for you.”

"You must do nothing of the kind. It isn't manners, you know, to run away directly I come to see you. If Benson don't appease my unholy appetite in some shape, it is possible there may be a coroner's inquest on Benson. Don't fidget, mother, I shall get plenty to eat."

"Quite right to have it up here," laughed Rosie, with a saucy toss of her little head. "We might not have taken 'the bother' to come down, you know."

"You would. Such a chance of some one to chatter to you'd never have missed."

"I don't know about health, mother, but we ought to congratulate him on the stock of impertinence he has laid in at the sea-side. A most unnecessary addition, surely, to what he had on hand."

Mrs. Ellerton only smiled. She was too well used to the badinage habitual between these two to pay much attention to it. Besides, here the tray made its appearance, and was it not necessary to see that Dainty was fed? That nonchalant dragoon seemed to require a considerable amount of attention, requesting his mother to pour out his wine for him, and perform other small offices during his repast. But Dainty was no novice in making much of his mother, and knew she wouldn't have been half satisfied unless he had exacted a good deal at her hands.

Miss Fielding also understood this perfectly, and was especially careful never to jest on such occasions, otherwise Frank Ellerton had not been spared a laughing commentary on his laziness; but Rosie was blessed with a quick perception and honest womanly sympathies, and, with all her love of fun, wouldn't have interfered between those two for the world.

"Did you tell them to get your room ready, Frank?" inquired Maurice, as Dainty's meal came to an end.

"No, old fellow, because I am sorry to say I don't want it. I'm off again by the eleven-thirty train. Leave's up, and I've promised to ride a horse for Tom Corrance in the Bibury Stakes. Greatest brute out, I'm told, but they don't get rid of me very often, and, one consolation, I fall very light when they do."

"I wish you wouldn't ride races," said Mrs. Ellerton.

"Pooh! mother, this is only on the flat. I can't be more that kicked off, and that never does injury, except to one's personal vanity."

"Well, I hope, Dainty, it won't take place in front of the stand, at all events," said Miss Fielding.

"Ah! we'll have a bet, Rosie, if you like. You owe me half-a-dozen pair of gloves, remember."

"What a dun you are! No one but you would have dared remind me of such a trivial circumstance."

"Gloves, like oysters, *ma belle cousine*, are getting rapidly unattainable, except by those whose purses know no bottom. We hand-to-mouth livers can no longer afford to let moneyed young women like you escape their liabilities."

"Well, I'll pay. But what's our bet to be?"

"A dozen pair of gloves that I'm not kicked off."

"You!" replied Rose, with a most contemptuous *moue*—"as if that were likely! Besides, do you think," she continued, with a winning smile, "that I should like to get gloves out of you in that fashion? Don't you know I should be as mortified as yourself?"

"Well, yes; I don't think you'd care to see me come to grief, Rosie. We'll back the mount for a fiver between us—will that do?"

"Yes—that's a deal better; and don't come near me if you don't win, because I shall know you are only on dunning intent," retorted Miss Fielding, gaily.

"Well, now, I must be off. God bless you, mother!" exclaimed Dainty, as he clasped her in his arms; and with a warm pressure of his hand to his brother and cousin, Frank Ellerton took his departure.





CHAPTER V.

WITH A BROGUE IN IT.

F ever a man should be wooing in earnest, and wish to test the progress of his suit, let him be assured that a short absence will stand him in good stead. It should be just long enough to enable the object of his homage to miss him sorely, without extending to such length as to teach her once more to do without him. If her face don't tell him what he would fain know on his return, he is either a bad physiognomist, or can prepare himself for extended travel without delay.

Jennie Holdershed, though nothing more than a little piqued at Dainty's indifference about their parting in the first instance, now thinks of him more than is judicious for a maiden who would still keep fancy free. Trout-fishing, certainly, is not half the sport it used to be a fortnight back, and there are a certain pair of somewhat stained kid gloves, which she had laughingly confiscated to her own use one afternoon, that Jennie seems to take great care of—in no hurry to wear them out, apparently, albeit they do not fit her shapely hand so very badly, for Dainty's extremities are quite of a feminine type. Her basket, too, is by no means so well filled as heretofore. It is not likely. She had not only enjoyed the benefit of his experience as to what fly to use, but his rod had always contributed liberally to the storing of her creel. Still Jennie continues to fish; it amuses her a good deal, if not quite so entertaining as it used to be, and, thanks to

Dainty's instructions, she is now a very fair proficient in the art.

One fine afternoon, Jennie, pursuing her favourite diversion, arrived at a bend in the stream where a tiny promontory jutted out, covered with a clump of alders. She seated herself, for she felt a little tired, and gazed daintily on the stream. Her tall, well-rounded, symmetrical figure made a pretty picture as, throwing off her hat, she leant back on the soft turf, with her head upon her hand. She had been there some ten minutes, when her attention was aroused by a man's voice the other side of the alders, lamenting his ill-luck in tones half petulant, half humorous.

"Faith, and it's gone ye are now!" he soliloquized, in most racy Irish brogue; "and if ye were but my own property, it's mighty little I'd fret about that same. It's the first time ever I came trout-fishing, and, by my sowl, I think it'll be the last; and Dainty Ellerton, the impostor, he swore it was great diversion! I'd like to see what he'd think of it this minute, if he were in my shoes."

Jennie, her curiosity thoroughly excited, sprang quickly to her feet and made her way round the little alder-clump. Standing on the bank, with the butt of a fishing-rod in his hand, and gazing ruefully at the top joint, which was floating in the stream, was a tall, athletic young fellow, some twenty years or so of age. He rejoiced in hair which even the mother who bore him must have admitted to be red; a pair of light grey eyes, which twinkled with fun and high spirits; mouth large, and furnished with strong white teeth; a frank, good-humoured face, though most decidedly not a handsome one.

"Well," he continued, "I suppose I'm bound to go in. Old Sherringham would be in a pretty taking about the loss of the rod. One comfort, wet clothes 'll be pleasanter, maybe, than dry ones to sit in this weather. Here goes."

"I'm afraid you've got into difficulties," said Jennie, with a merry smile. Since he had mentioned Dainty's name, she felt irresistibly impelled to address this man.

The discomfited fisherman turned quickly as her voice met his ear, gazed at her for a moment with unmistake-

able admiration, then, raising his hat, replied, with all the gallantry and readiness of his countrymen :

“ 'Deed, I thought so a moment ago ; but difficulties always vanish when such bright eyes as yours condescend to take an interest in their being overcome.”

The perfectly natural, respectful manner in which the compliment was paid prevented its being the least offensive.

“ What's the matter ?” inquired Jennie.

“ Ah ! then, it's the first time ever I tried fly-fishing, an' I've whipped and whipped, an' never rose a fish the day ; an' at last I thought I'd try a long cast, and, by the powers, I've hooked the opposite bank, I fancy ! Troth !” he continued, with a gay smile, “ it's a blessing, ye know, to hook something, anyway.”

“ It won't be very good to land,” laughed Jennie ; “ and I don't see how I can help you.”

“ Oh ! yes, you can,” replied the fisherman ; “ ye can stand on the bank while I go in about it. Sure, ye can scream murther if I look in danger of drowning.”

“ I don't think you run much danger,” retorted the girl, gaily.

“ Faith, an' I'm much of the same way of thinking, or I'd perhaps not be so bould. But it 'd be a blessing,” he continued, as his eyes twinkled, “ to have some one to screech directions about one's burying to, you know, av the stream proves deceptive. I'll leave you my watch and hat to take care of ; and, faith, if I was making a regular will, and leaving ye sole legatee, ye'd not come into much more.”

With this he dashed into the stream, and, though he got wet considerably above his waist, succeeded in rescuing his rod, though at the cost of his flies, which were inextricably entangled amongst the weeds.

“ Thanks,” he said, as he regained the bank. “ Mighty ungallant of me not to have stayed there for good,” he continued, laughing and pointing to the stream. “ It's being ill-mannered enough to dispute the legacy, isn't it ? Had it been but a little bigger, I'd never have ventured to be so rude as to come out.”

Jennie was immensely amused at her new acquaintance.

His perfectly frank, unembarrassed manner attracted the girl greatly.

"I don't know where you are going," she said; "but I live in the village just above here, and if you would like to dry your wet clothes a little, and take a glass of brandy-and-water after your bath, my uncle, I know, will be glad to see you."

Bibulous old gentleman, little doubt of that. Any one in search of "nor'-westers" he invariably took an interest in.

"You really are very kind," said the young man, with a courteous bow. "An' if ye'll allow me, I'll trespass on your hospitality. I ought to tell you who I am. My name's Weaver. I belong to the regiment quartered at Portland; an' the divils—och, I beg pardon, it's me brother officers I mane—usually call me Tim."

Mr. Weaver's brogue always became very pronounced when he got excited, but though it never quite left him, there were occasions when it became almost imperceptible.

"Well," replied Jennie, making desperate efforts to suppress her laughter, "we shall be very glad to help you in your necessities, Mr. Weaver."

But the quick Irishman perceived her amusement at once, and, purposely exaggerating his natural accent, exclaimed:

"Is it the length of the diminutive amuses ye? Bedad, the crathurs are that lazy they'd make it shorter av they only knew how."

"Excuse me," suddenly returned the girl, "but I was an involuntary confidante of your remarks on your difficulties by the river. You mentioned Mr. Ellerton's name. Do you know him?"

"Know him! Faith, I've known Dainty since I was the height of a walking-stick. I know him and all his people well. They're very kind to me whenever I happen to be in London. Not that that's often, for it's very few pounds I have to spare, and, as a rule, I stick pretty close to the regiment."

This speech was very characteristic of Mr. Tim Weaver. That lighthearted Irishman never made the slightest concealment of his affairs to the world. He would confide

his loves, embarrassments, etc., not only to the mess, but to any stranger that he might be thrown in contact with. And the perfect *naïveté* with which he did it was irresistibly ludicrous. It was almost impossible to upset his imperturbable good-humour, and he would join in the laugh against himself with inconceivable gusto. Still he had once given evidence in his corps that it was possible to rouse him, and shown such a perfect recklessness of consequences upon that occasion, that nobody had ever questioned since but that, far as the laugh might be carried against Tim Weaver, there was a limit it would be dangerous to pass.

Most schoolboys in their earlier days idealize some boy of superior standing in the school to themselves, and elect him their hero. The delusion may sometimes not last long, at others it often extends over years, nay, even a lifetime. Now this was exactly Tim Weaver's case. He had been originally, as a very small boy, at Lasterton with Dainty, who at that time had attained the dignity of "the fifth." Some distant cousinship existed between them, I believe. At all events, Dainty had been besought to throw the ægis of his protection over the red-haired little Irish boy. Dainty, stepping down from the Olympus-like slopes of "the fifth," to take care of him, which he did in curt, haughty fashion, seemed, to the imaginative Irish child, like direct interference of the gods in his behalf. Dainty was always kind to him, and, in return, warm-hearted, hot-blooded Tim almost worshipped his protector.

This hero-worship had continued ever since. What was there Dainty couldn't do? Who could ride like him, shoot like him, swim like him? Who was so clever as Frank Ellerton? Tim himself, *par parenthèse*, was not a very trustworthy authority on this point. In short, in Mr. Weaver's eyes Dainty was not only a *beau sabreur*, but an Admirable Crichton to boot. He believed thoroughly and implicitly that there was nothing beyond Dainty's capabilities, and he gauged all his acquaintance by this ideal standard that he had erected for himself.

Now, when a girl has conceived in her breast such germ of love for a man as to like him, esteem him, and

think a little about him in his absence, no higher forcing power can be applied to such germ than to meet one who already idealizes the being she is unconsciously preparing to worship. Jennie Holdershed could hardly have picked up an acquaintance more likely to nourish this as yet embryo love of hers. The seed was sown, though she was a long way off acknowledging it as yet. She is of a type that by no means part with their hearts lightly; but when they do, it is aye for ever. Whatever may be their destiny—and they often marry, and make good wives, too—they never love twice. Ah, well! you think such things cannot be—that there is no romance left in this material world of ours. You mistake; there is plenty of romance still, when you once penetrate this veneer of civilization we so much affect,

But we must refrain from further speculation on such psychological phenomena, and leave Jennie to take care of her own heart for the present. Ten minutes' time, and these fishers have arrived at the Upway cottage, and are genially welcomed by Captain Holdershed, who informs them that the Channel Fleet has put into Portland Roads. People not enjoying the advantage of that telescope of the Captain's said that one sloop of war had passed the entrance of the breakwater; but then, what reliance could be placed upon men who didn't own a glass at all, and were not gifted with a nautical eye to look through it, even if they did?

The Captain welcomed Mr. Weaver cordially, his cordiality increasing upon learning that Mr. Weaver was wet, and would have no objection to a "nor'-wester." The Captain betook himself very seriously to the composition of this specific for the benefit of his new and damp acquaintance, and with that consideration that marks true politeness, mixed himself another to keep his guest in countenance; compounded them, too, of unusual strength, on the principle that Mr. Weaver, having been well watered externally, required less in, and that it was beneath his dignity as a host to drink milder fluids than the stranger within his gates—an idea this last ever uppermost in the Captain's mind—part, we may say, of the code of honour of that bibulous mariner. Although

Mr. Weaver was young, he had graduated in whiskey-toddy in his own country. If you have mastered the alphabet of that in "the west," it will take a good deal of the Saxon's brandy and water to trouble you. The Captain was charmed at the ease and affability with which his guest disposed of the tumbler he had compounded for his delectation.

"I like you, sir—you're a good fellow. Your clothes ain't half dried yet. Stop and have some supper with us. Jennie, tell that" (great redundancy of language here) "never-to-be-forgiven fool to broil an extra rasher, or something or another."

The young man hesitated; but Jennie interfering with a bright smile and quick little nod of endorsement, he replied:

"Faith, Captain, to say no to a good offer is against all canons of polite society, more especially when one meets a gentleman with such an illigant turn for the mixing of the spirits as yourself."

That supper was a very cheery meal. The Captain was delighted with his new acquaintance, and Jennie much amused with his good-humoured *naiveté*; while, as for Mr. Weaver, he possessed that happy knack of incorporating himself with whatever society he might be thrown into, which must always be regarded as one of the most desirable attributes vouchsafed to man. Nothing ever upset Mr. Weaver's Irish self-possession; whether conversing with country girl or countess, he would have pleasantly confided his personal history and hopes to their ears; nor would it ever have occurred to him to doubt that they could be otherwise than interested in his narrative. Plenty of humour and quick perception all the same in this wild Irish lad, and though not what is called ready of fence, yet his droll remarks often turned the tables on his assailants.

"Ha! ha!" laughed the Captain, in answer to some joke of Mr. Weaver's. "Good again, sir—good again. This is a lad of the right sort, Jennie—very different from that kid-gloved, dandified swab that you took up with a while back." And the Captain's face, between liberal libations and merriment, glowed through the smoke-wreaths

that surrounded it like a tropical sun. "Here's 'May we ne'er want a friend nor a bottle to give him.' Old buffers like me substitute that for 'Sweethearts and wives,' Mr. Weaver, on Saturday nights."

"Ugh! you ould haythen!" retorted the Ensign, "what'd you be missing out the women for in that way, the darlints? It's mighty mane I'd think of the capacity of a man that couldn't drink the two of those toasts one evening in the week. Faith, as the song says, 'ye'd never do for Galway.'"

"Wouldn't I?" roared the Captain—"tumbler for tumbler with any man in the country!

'As I sailed from the Downs in the *Nancy*,
My jib! how she smacked through the breeze!
She's a vessel as tight to my fancy
As ever sailed on the salt seas.'

D'ye sing, Mr. What's-your-name? That grog-renouncing fellow, Jennie, could tune up, to give the devil his due."

"Uncle, you had better stop throwing hard words at Mr. Ellerton. It so happens that he is a friend of Mr. Weaver's."

"Is it Dainty Ellerton? Troth, Captain, an' divil a greater friend I have in the world than Dainty. Faith, he's been pulling me out of the fire all my life!"

"He's a white-livered milk-sop—that's what he is!" retorted the Captain, sullenly.

"Hould your tongue, ye ould omadhaun!" exclaimed the excited Irishman. "Tear an' ages, that I should live to hear Dainty called white-livered! Listen to me, thin—indeed, I beg pardon, Miss Holdershed, but your uncle's talking nonsense."

"Never mind apologizing, Mr. Weaver," replied Jennie, smiling. "He dislikes Mr. Ellerton, and abuses him with neither rhyme no reason."

"Listen to me thin, the two of ye, and judge whether Dainty's got the soft dhrop in him. It's a good many years ago now when I was first chucked head and crop, a mere bit of a gossoon, into a public school. I don't think I ever was of a whimpering sort, but to a boy fresh from

home the life there comes a bit hard at first, if he's the ill luck to fall into the hands of a bully. Ye may laugh, Miss Jennie, looking at the big baste I am now, but I couldn't take care of myself in those days. Well, the head of my house was a big fellow called Hawkins, and he just made my life a misery to me. Faith, the blackguard had a talent for bullying, and exercised it freely. Well, Dainty, I knew, had been asked to look after me a bit; and at times he would stop me and ask how I got on, and I always said pretty well, for you see I couldn't go sneaking and whining to him, and tell him what a miserable little beggar I was in reality. However, one day he came across me howling me little wretched heart out. You see Hawkins had thrashed me within an inch of my life that afternoon, and a slip of a boy as I was then couldn't help yelping. Dainty stopped and asked me all about it. I didn't like to tell him at first, but he soon got it all out of me. He didn't say much, but he told me to meet him at the back of the Fives Court as soon as afternoon school was over. When I got there I found Hawkins, Dainty, and a lot more fellows of the upper school; and then they told me there was going to be a fight; that Dainty had told Hawkins, before all the Fifth, that he was a cowardly, skulking bully; and that then Hawkins had challenged him. Troth, I mind the thing well yet. Dainty called out to me before he stripped, and said, 'Now, young un, look after my things. I'm going to settle this matter for you.' 'They didn't look a match, for Hawkins was a deal the biggest of the two, an' I know I felt awful sorry; both for meself and Dainty. I thought he'd be licked, ye see, and bedad if he was I knew how I'd catch it. Well, Miss Jennie," continued Tim, turning to the girl, who he could see listened with great interest to his narrative, "to cut a long story short, they fought for three quarters of an hour—an' a bigger fight was never seen at the back of the Fives Court. If Hawkins was the biggest and strongest, Dainty was a deal the most active, and quickest with his hands. It was a hard fight, and towards the finish Hawkins's weight and strength began to tell, and Dainty was being gradually worn down. Still, knocked about, and growing weak as he was, he wouldn't give in. I suppose

he'd have been beat, but some of the sixth interfered and stopped it. I can hear Dainty now, as, slowly putting his coat on, he turned round to his antagonist, and said, 'Recollect, Hawkins, whenever you lift a finger to young Weaver, you'll have to fight this over again, if it's six days a week. What d'ye say now, Captain Holdershed?' cried the Irishman, triumphantly.

"Say, sir," replied that ever-thirsty mariner, with extreme presence of mind. "Say, sir," he repeated, solemnly, "I say that we must drink his health."

Even Jennie, albeit she thought it was getting high time to interfere with the "nor'-westers," could not but assent to this toast. She had listened with sparkling eyes to Tim Weaver's story, so confirmatory as it was of her own estimate of Dainty Ellerton.

"Here's Mr. Ellerton's health!" And then the Captain, much given to snatches of Dibdin in his mirthful moments, trolled out:

" 'Twas in the good ship *Rover*
I sailed the world around,
And for three years and over
I ne'er touched British ground.
At length in England landed,
I left the roaring main,
Found relations stranded,
And went to sea again."

The Captain had never been known to sing a song through, but when pleased he was continually breaking out into fragments of Dibdin, and sometimes under very *mal à propos* circumstances.

"Mr. Ellerton's a trump!—you're a trump—we're all trumps! We'll just have one more glass, 'cos we're all trumps." And the veteran looked genially around him.

"No, no!" cried Jennie, as she dexterously captured the brandy-bottle; "you've had quite enough to-night, uncle. And I'm sure," she continued, meaningly, "Mr Weaver must think it high time to be on his road to Port land."

"Deed, and ye're right, Miss Jennie," replied the ensign. "Faix, it's curious how time slips away when the company's pleasant! Good night to ye, Captain."

Good night," he continued, turning to the girl. "Maybe ye'd not mind giving me a lesson in the fly-fishing some day?"

"Whenever you like," replied the girl, extending her hand, frankly. "We shall be always glad to see you."

"Good night again, and thanks for your kindness, past, present, and to come," laughed the Irishman, as he vanished into the soft summer night.

Jenny, sleeking her dusky tresses preparatory to going to bed, meditates a good deal upon this school-boy story of Dainty Ellerton's heroism



CHAPTER VI.

SYMPTOMS OF TROUBLE.



DAINTY ELLERTON is riding a series of most indifferent mounts at the Bibury Club meeting this pleasant June afternoon, nor troubling his mind, shameful to narrate, one iota about his fair fellow-sportsman at Upway. Dainty says, laughingly, that it has seldom fallen to the lot of a gentleman rider to have so many opportunities of losing money, by yielding to the temptation of taking the long odds so handsomely proffered against oneself, as have been his this day. But Dainty has hurt himself little in that wise. He is now smoking a cigar on the steps of the Bibury Club Stand, and listening with placid indifference to a friend who, having purchased a daily paper, is reading out an account of the commotion caused by the sudden suspension of Clinch, Grant, and Chillingham. Dainty feels but little interest in the reverses that have befallen Clinch, Grant, and Chillingham. He meditates more upon how disappointed Rosie will be that he couldn't get that kicking brute of Corrance's nearer than second, and so failed to land that sixty pounds to five that he, in accordance with agreement, had ventured between them. If Dainty could but see into his brother's private room in King William Street, he would perhaps view the misfortunes of Clinch, Grant, and Chillingham with considerably more sympathy.

Maurice Ellerton sits at his desk, his head buried in his hands. Occasionally he raises a pallid face, bearing

testimony to his agony—his despair. He has locked himself in, so that no man may witness his humiliation. For weeks he has been haunted by a dread of this; now the crash has come, and he literally cowers under the blow. It is not for himself—it is for the ruin in which he has involved those nearest and dearest to him. In this moment of supreme agony he can no longer juggle with himself; he knows that what he has stedfastly denied for the last year is true—that Rose Fielding is dearer to him than life—that he loves with all the fierce passion of a man in his prime, the love of whom, compared with that of youth, is as fiery burgundy to sparkling champagne.

Even now, with ruin yawning all around him—black abysses gaping on every side, of a profundity and density only to be measured by the poor stricken mortal they concern—even now he loses all consciousness of aught else, and becomes involved in dreamy speculation as to whether she will ever love him. Even that mother, so loved, so revered, and to whom all this means the negation of the home, the luxuries, and the life that she has been accustomed to—even she for a moment fades from out of the tortured man's thoughts. He can think of nothing but how a pair of dancing blue eyes will look upon his folly—what a pair of laughing lips will have to say to his crime.

His love has never been told—little likely to be told now, unless it escape him in a wild frenzied shriek of despair. What has he to do with love—a man who, in a few days' time, will call forth scalding tears from all that are dear to him—the mocking laughter of the world he mixes in? Were it but fair commercial bankruptcy, then Maurice Ellerton could have looked things in the face, his head lowered, it may be, but not bowed to the dust, as now. He had dared ask sympathy from his mother and Rosie under such circumstances, but now the halo of his disgrace must surround them too. He ponders over all these things in dull, dreamy fashion—thinks, even, of the blow it will be to that dandy hussar brother who thinks so much of him.

Then he meditates whether it were not best to fly from

all this disgrace while it is yet time. To do him justice, he is thinking far more of sparing the feelings of those he loves than of the consequences likely to accrue to himself when all becomes known. But shame upon him involves shame upon them. Should he go, while opportunity is yet vouchsafed him?

A sharp tap at the door breaks the thread of his musings. He rises, opens it, and admits Rolf Laroom.

"A devil of a business this, Ellerton!" exclaims the latter. "The sooner we talk it over the better."

"Sit down," replied Maurice, with a ghastly smile. "We can talk it over if you choose; but I presume even you can suggest nothing to save us."

Mr. Laroom hesitated for a few moments.

"I could name a dozen ways of pulling through, had it been any one else; but Clinch, Grant, and Chillingham hold those mortgages, you know."

Maurice nodded.

"Difficult now, you see," continued Laroom slowly, and speaking with great deliberation, "to recover those without putting down a large sum of money—more, by a good deal, than we can lay hands on, eh? And yet, if we don't recover them, I fear, my dear Ellerton, you might be accused of breach of trust."

"No need for your accursed recapitulation of how I stand," retorted Maurice fiercely. "Do you see any way out of it?"

"Not just yet," replied Laroom. "But, bless you! don't despair. I have seen worse scrapes than this weathered in the City in my time. Let me think a bit."

There was silence between them. Maurice sat with his head once more buried in his hands, gazing down a vista of unutterable woe—picturing the wrecked lives of all those he held dearest, the shivering of all love for him in this world. Drearier future, perhaps, it were scarce possible for a man to look upon. Mr. Laroom, with vindictive, malicious eyes, sat watching his abased, unconscious partner.

Rolf Laroom, with his jealous, vengeful temperament, had discovered Maurice's secret love for Rosie long before Maurice had admitted it to himself, and fell into the

error of deeming it recognized and returned. To a man who could so cherish resentment of a girl's scorn, at what even he could but allow was a great impertinence, it may be easily imagined that to his perverted imagination this seemed but another wrong that required to be atoned for. At all events, Laroom regarded it in that light. He had made up his mind to wed Rosie Fielding, and all obstacles in his path to that end he intended should be removed, with slight scruple regarding the means to be employed therein. Not a man likely to be delicate about such means—capable, indeed, of resorting to anything that might serve his turn, as long as it lay within the limits of the law.

At this present moment he looks upon the game as in his own hands. He considers that he alone can save Maurice Ellerton from exposure; that he might even save the tottering firm of Ellerton and Co., and would be glad indeed to do so, should he succeed in driving the bargain he desires.

"Well?" suddenly exclaimed Maurice, hoarsely, as he raised his head.

"Don't be impatient, my dear Ellerton," returned his partner, suavely. "I am afraid there is no doubt if everything tumbles to pieces, and all is dragged to the light of day, that the public, taking into their coarse minds to call a spade a spade, may possibly accuse you and your late lamented father of having made away with your charming ward's property. Of course, under those circumstances," continued Mr. Laroom, delicately placing the tips of his fingers together, and leaning back in his chair, as if it really was no particular business of his, "the first thing to consider is how we can prevent everything tumbling to pieces."

"Go on," said Maurice, tersely.

"Pray be cool. Please to remember that, if I am not concerned in that more unpleasant contingency, yet I also am involved in the break up of Ellerton and Son."

If he was, to judge by his easy, placid demeanour, he was either well insured with the underwriters, or had little cargo left aboard of that sore-beset argosy,

"I suppose you have some scheme to put before one,

when you are tired of hearing yourself talk," replied his auditor, hoarsely.

"No, indeed, not much to-day," returned Laroom. "The prevention of things tumbling to pieces, as far as my experience goes, is simply a question of money. True, we don't know exactly where to lay our hands upon it at this minute, but it will be my business, between this (this being Tuesday) and Thursday, to ascertain what we can raise, and what we require—more especially what will bring those mortgage deeds back into our own hands."

Maurice's face flushed with excitement as, springing to his feet, he exclaimed:

"By Jove, Laroom, you have saved me! We shall tide over it yet!"

"I don't know, Ellerton," replied the other, slowly. "The money is not raised yet, and you may not like the price you will have to pay for it when it is. Don't be too sanguine, is quite as good a motto as *nil desperandum*."

And so saying, Rolf Laroom softly rubbed his hands, and regarded his partner from beneath his half-closed eyelids.

"Yes, I know," retorted Maurice, a little nervously. "But you are so clever, I know you will manage to hit off something between this and Thursday."

"Well, I hope so, or else Ellerton and Son will be numbered among things gone to decay. But it's no use giving in till the cards are played out; throwing down one's hand is always a sign of weak intellect, however things may look against one. There is always the forlorn hope that the adversary may revoke or commit similar misdemeanour. I'd see it out if I were you." And as he concluded, Rolf Laroom stealthily eyed his companion with exceeding interest.

"Pooh! of course I shall," replied Maurice, quickly. "What could make you think otherwise? But I can be of no more use here to-day," he continued, putting on his hat; "and, as this business has unhinged me a good deal, I shall go quietly home."

"Certainly; but recollect you *must* be here on Thursday. Your assent will, at all events, be necessary to what I may have to put before you."

"Of course," said Maurice, pausing to button his glove "But I know you will succeed. I've great faith in your luck, Laroom. Good-bye."

Rolf Laroom nodded in reply, and indulged in a low laugh as the door closed behind Ellerton.

"Yes, you do right to have faith in my luck," he muttered; "but luck to me, Maurice Ellerton, may be by no means luck to you. This failure of Clinch and Co. brings the goal I have been aiming at these four years considerably nearer—in short, it is arrived at."

He rose and lounged across to Maurice's desk. His eye fell upon an open Bradshaw.

"As I thought—studying obscure routes to the Continent," he said, musingly. "I fancied he might meditate flight. But, Maurice Ellerton, that won't suit my book at present. You must hear my proposition first, at all events; and if you reject it—well, I don't think you will find going abroad quite practicable. *Nous verrons.*" And with this Mr. Laroom also sallied forth, in pursuance of certain tortuous schemes of which we shall speedily see the upshot.

Maurice, meanwhile, with the feelings of a man whose sentence is temporarily suspended, strides away towards his home. He breathes again, and once more thinks that this great cloud of shame is to be arrested in its descent—may, indeed, never descend and overwhelm him. Miserable delusion! as if the storms our follies and vices have gathered are not ever predestined to burst upon our uncovered heads!

"A lie," cries Carlyle, "must be taken up and expiated by somebody. If the issuer escapes punishment, some one of the endorsers must suffer." It were greater justice that he who gave that lie to the world should bear the consequences. But, in commercial lies, alas! the atonement has oftentimes to be made by the innocent. Maurice Ellerton has launched his lie, and most assuredly somebody will be the worse for it.

It is in no very jubilant frame of mind that he rings at the door of his own house. Although no longer the despairing man of two hours ago, yet he wonders vaguely whether this day month that house will hail him master.

A slight shiver runs through him at the thought of his mother and Rosie bowed down with shame in obscure lodgings, the locality undefinable to his mind, but, above all, obscure. He even hesitates at the umbrella-stand— noticing such trifling things as men with ruin staring them in the face are won't to do—and wonders whether there will be one in that new home of theirs—wonders again where he shall be, whether abroad or in prison.

He has ascended the stairs and entered the drawing-room by this time, but finds it empty. Restlessly he paces up and down. He had jumped so rapidly to faith in Laroom at the office, that faith begins to fail him now. True, his subtle partner is clever; but is this a knot possible to unravel?

A light step behind him, a light hand on his shoulder, and he turns abruptly round upon his mother.

"Come and sit down, Maurice," she says softly, "and have a cup of tea with me. You are worried, my boy, and look—oh! so fagged and tired! I'm not going to pester you with questions—you know I never do. There, get into that chair, and I'll ring for the tea-cups and saucers, and you can tell me as much or as little as you like of your annoyances."

He sank into the chair she indicated, her every sentence stinging him. Yet a few days, and her heart might be well-nigh breaking for his sin. She busied herself for a few minutes about the tea-service; then, seating herself beside him, stole her hand into his, and said:

"Throw your business cares off till to-morrow, Maurice, and think what news you've brought home for the mother; you know what a gossip she is, and surely you've something to amuse her with."

But Maurice's sole reply to his mother's little speech was a weary, loving smile.

"Ah, well! never mind. If you're too tired to talk, sit back and sleep," replied Mrs. Ellerton, as she passed her hand caressingly through his hair.

Small chance of that, though, for suddenly, like a gleam of sunshine, enters the bright little torment of that household, waving a telegraphic despatch over her head.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, pausing at the threshold, and shaking the paper she held in her hand, in mock minatory fashion at Mrs. Ellerton, "I thought so. Yes, there you are, mother, petting that lazy hope of the house, and never thinking of your poor younger children, who are ruined. Ruined, I said, mother; I don't want to harrow up your feelings unnecessarily, but Dainty and I are lost past redemption;" and with that Miss Fielding threw herself into a chair, and declared that nothing but an immediate cup of tea could prevent her from "going off."

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Ellerton, smiling.

"The workhouse—that's what it is," replied Rosie, demurely. "Never mind Maurice, mother; it is I who require all your sympathy and attention."

"What is it, child?"

"Oh, dear! read. I'm sure I haven't the heart to tell you;" and so saying, Rosie tossed the telegram across to her aunt.

"Beaten half a length. The brute did run honest, but I could not get home. Clean broke in gloves, are we not?"

"Serve you right, you little gambler!" laughed Mrs. Ellerton. "You'll have to economise now, and go about in mittens."

"In what?" exclaimed Rosie, sitting bolt upright, and staring at her aunt in pretended amazement.

"Mittens."

"What! knitted things without fingers—things that are never worn, except by vinegary old cats!" cried Rosie, springing to her feet. "No, Mrs. Ellerton, never! Ring the bell for a cab—I prefer the workhouse."

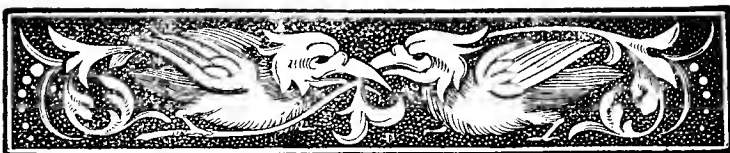
Pleasant to listen to this jesting about ruin to a man who knew it had all but come—who saw it gaping fathomless, unbridgeable, before his eyes. And now Rosie has glided to his side, and leans her hand in loving sisterly caress on his shoulder.

"What is it, Maurice?" she asks—"what makes you look so sad?"

And once more has Mrs. Ellerton stolen her hand into

her son's, and fondles it in mute sympathy. Is it to be wondered that Maurice Ellerton, conscious of the wrong he has wrought these women, suffers torture inconceivable? Every loving word, every caress that they employ to wean him from his dark thoughts, is but an additional arrow planted in his soul. Small cause of surprise to us, to whom the writhing nerves lie bare. He can sustain such agony no longer, and, brusquely pleading a severe headache, he escapes to his own room.





CHAPTER VII.

MAURICE ELLERTON'S WALK.

MAURICE ELLERTON next morning would have fain gone out from his home unseen, unnoticed. Little likely that was possible, with his mother's loving, watchful eyes, all open to the fact that her firstborn was in sore trouble. She was down betimes ; although she constantly let him breakfast alone, and depart for the City without seeing her, she glided gently into the dining-room this day almost as he sat down. She received his kiss quietly, and made no attempt to draw from him what it was that so weighed upon his spirit, but the sweet solicitude with which she hovered over him during the meal showed how she would fain share his burden if she might. Rare was Mrs. Ellerton's tact and tenderness with those she loved. She never harassed them with question or obtrusive sympathy in their hours of darkness. She only fluttered softly around them, in a gentle fashion altogether her own.

Little conversation passed between mother and son, but Maurice understood perfectly what Mrs. Ellerton's presence meant this morning. He could not repress an inward shiver, as she said :

"Must you go to work to-day ? You look scarcely fit for it."

"Nonsense, mother ; I'm well enough. Add to which there is a good bit of business on hand just now. Even if I was ill, which I am not, I should have to put my shoulder to the wheel for the next week or two."

"You know best, Maurice," she replied, softly, "but I

would it were otherwise. I know a few days' rest would be good for you."

"Rest!" he thought to himself, bitterly. "Shall I ever know it again? Even if we tide over this difficulty, my crime will be but hidden, not buried—liable to be dragged to the light of day at any time."

At last he is in the street, and walks mechanically cityward. Walks rapidly, too, after his wont; but ere he reaches Temple Bar he reflects that it is useless his going there to-day. Laroom had said that it would be Thursday before his plans for their extrication could be completed—quite possible that the case, indeed, might prove beyond his powers of cooking, although, as Maurice well knew, they were considerable. Truth to tell, Rolf Laroom had much to say to Maurice Ellerton's present position. He it was who, some time back, when the firm was first suffering under pressure, had suggested the borrowing of money on Miss Fielding's property. Of course they could pay it off again as soon as things came a little round. But it was not likely the affairs of Ellerton and Co. would come round when the virtual manager of the firm was a man bent on the ruin of his partner, to serve his own ends. Rosie's estate became like a milch cow to the tottering mercantile house. A mortgage on that was their resource in all cases of emergency. Cases of emergency waxed frequent, and at the present moment Miss Fielding's property is mortgaged to its full value. Clinch, Grant, and Chillingham are the holders of those deeds, and their creditors are now demanding their money in shrill clamorous chorus. Foreclosure of those deeds is imminent, should such claims not be properly complied with.

Foreclosure in this instance simply means the publishing to the world that the whole of Miss Fielding's property has been fraudulently made away with by her trustees—to wit, Francis Ellerton, her uncle, now deceased, and Maurice Ellerton, her cousin, still alive to expiate that breach of trust as the laws of his country have decreed.

Maurice turns and retraces his steps. He walks rapidly westward now. He has no particular destination, is

scarce conscious, indeed, in what direction his footsteps drift. Man has a tendency to drown reflection in such cases by violent exercise. But if "black care" sits behind the horseman, how is the mere pedestrian to get away from him? Though your capabilities be of the highest, yet shall you fail to walk away from that gnawing at the entrails which men call remorse.

Maurice Ellerton's crime at this time hardly presents itself to his mind in its true turpitude. Our sense of moral rectitude is speedily numbed when the straight path is once departed from; and Maurice at present meditates only on the consequences of his offence. He is thinking not so much about what those consequences may be to himself; it is the anguish it will occasion to those so dear to him that fills his soul. If the blow could fall upon him alone, he had been content to make such atonement as the law might exact; but when he thought of his mother and Rosie, with heads bowed to the ground by the shame they must be participators in—when he thought of proud, fastidious Dainty, scarce able to look his brother officers in the face, by reason of the reproach that would attach to his name, Maurice Ellerton tasted the first bitter fruits of the seed he had sown.

He wanders on up Oxford Street, down Bayswater way, wondering at times whether he carries his guilt legible in his face. A policeman has a strange fascination for him. He meditates when he passes one, as to whether that is the man destined to arrest him. Shall he be at large this day week?—and where will they take him first? He pictures to himself the preliminary examination before a police magistrate; how his *friends*, he thinks, will flock to hear that. And then, O God! he fancies his mother reading it in the evening paper. The blood surges in his temples, his head swims at the thought; he grinds his teeth savagely and impotently. To what end? He is compassed in the toils his own hand has wrought!

And men do take such walks, and think such thoughts, even when their offending has been infinitely less than Maurice Ellerton's. Has reckless gambling or reckless extravagance never led to similar reflection? Ruined man for the most part wrecks some luckless woman in

the fulfilment of that destiny he has carved out for himself.

Again and again does Maurice Ellerton ask himself the question, how is this blow to be averted from those he holds dear? And ever and again rings back in his ear the stern response—the innocent usually suffer with the guilty. When men, from lust of gold, indolence, or want of principle, bring themselves to shame, they bring their people also thereto.

“Well,” he mutters, “it’s possible, after all, Laroom may manage to pull us through. He is clever, full of resources, and by no means despondent. But then,” he reflected, with a dreary shudder, “it can be only for the time; it will be a respite, not a reprieve.”

He turns into Kensington Gardens by the gravel-pits, still wandering indefinitely, still engaged in the pursuit of the unattainable—the escape from his own thoughts. No, crossing the sea nor journeyings into foreign lands do not rescue us from that Nemesis of memory that attends upon our misdeeds. We bear it about with us, like the fabled Hebrew, unless, indeed, our conscience and better self get sodden with perpetual iniquity. You may so saturate the soul with vice that it shall lose all sense of that better and brighter existence it was born to—be conscious of nothing but an instinctive thirst to gratify its own selfish appetites at all costs—have neither feeling of love, regret, nor remorse left to it. In uneducated natures this is, of course, common; in cultivated man or woman one of the saddest sights this sun looks down upon—final wreck of a human being who has been taught to think.

As he passes the fountains, a chubby-faced urchin of four or five years old, in hot pursuit of another, trips and falls heavily on the gravelled walk. Maurice, ever good-natured and kindly to children, picks him up, and endeavours to soothe him; but, absorbed in his own woes, and frightened at the stranger, the boy refuses to be pacified, and screams tumultuously for his nurse. Maurice resigns his charge at her approach, and continues his walk; but even this slight incident wrings his tortured mind. He is rather fond of and wont to be popular with the little people, and as he wends his weary way onwards,

he mutters bitterly to himself, "The very children can see my sin written in my face!"

Mechanically he turns into Hyde Park; he is scarce conscious of where he is going, or he would never have walked up Rotten Row in his present mood. The meeting with acquaintances is the last thing he would consider desirable, and though Maurice Ellerton is not very often seen there in the morning, yet he is tolerably well-known to society when he does put in an appearance. More than one fair head bends to him from the Ride; many a nod is bestowed upon him as he presses onward with quick, regular stride, in search of that unattainable goal he shall never get sight of in this world. Such greetings as his pre-occupied mind is conscious of he returns curtly, but many a bow and nod escape his notice. Still, nobody stops him; there is that in his face, set and absorbed as it is, that makes his acquaintance instinctively refrain from pulling him up. "Likely to get short answer," think some. "Looks as if he had lost a pot of money," muse some observant young men, to whom that calamity is constantly occurring. "Looks as if committed to running away with some woman with whom he didn't want to," remarks Mrs. Skendle Lynks to the last juvenile victim of her full-blown fascinations. But perfectly oblivious of the gaily-dressed throng, Maurice Ellerton holds on his way.

He has nearly reached Hyde Park Corner, when a loungee on the rails confronts him, and Maurice find his path barred by his hussar brother.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculates Dainty—"why, what has brought a working bee like yourself so far from the hive this summer's morning? To think of finding you, old fellow, disporting yourself among the drones and butterflies! But what's the row?—you look all out of sorts."

"I am," returned Maurice. "Business bothers, which it is needless to explain. I thought a walk might do me good, and have been for a stretch all round Kensington Gardens. Come and give me some lunch at the 'Rag'—I feel I want it, Dainty."

"With all my heart," replied Frank Ellerton, as he linked his arm within his brother's, and led the way to that great military caravansary.

When they were comfortably seated at one of those small tables beneath the portrait of Mistress Eleanor Wynne, with the marble-framed looking-glass of that royal concubine flashing the faint sunlight which permeates that apartment down upon their repast, Dainty had more leisure to study his brother's face. He saw at once, as he gazed upon the haggard features, that it was indeed sore trouble that beset him. Maurice, too, habitually most abstemious in the matter of wine, demanded champagne, and filled and emptied his glass with ominous celerity. Noting all these things, Dainty felt assured that his brother had come more or less to grief—a business crash of some kind, he presumed.

“Look here, Dainty,” exclaimed the elder brother, in a thick, unnatural voice at last, “we have been sworn allies hitherto—brothers in heart, not only in name. Is it not so?”

“Indeed it is, old fellow. You stood to me like a trump when I had to pay the consequences of my youthful indiscretions. If you hadn't pulled me through, Maurice, God knows where I might have been now! I shouldn't have been in the dear old corps, that's certain.”

“Well, when I tell you I fear I'm on the verge of similar trouble,” responded the elder brother, slowly, and filling his glass once more to the brim as he spoke, “I know I can depend upon you.”

Dainty looked very grave, and his reply came measured and low.

“Every stick I have is yours, Maurice, if you choose. I am afraid it's not very much, but we'll realize the commission, chargers, and what is left of my younger son's portion. Should it but stop the gap I'm satisfied.”

His brother gave a faint smile as he stretched his hand across the table; and, as the pair exchanged a warm clasp of the hand, he said:

“True as steel, Dainty—I knew it; but it's nothing of that kind I want of you. If the wreck is to come, the leak will be beyond your stopping. But I've more to ask of you than that. Don't you understand me?”

Dainty paused for a few minutes, and then gravely answered, “No.”

There was silence between them for a little. Frank Ellerton watched his brother's countenance keenly, and could not but recognize the troubled workings of the mind therein. It was long ere Maurice spoke again. At last came the hoarse whisper :

"Who's to tell our mother?"

"What! is that all?" cried Dainty, cheerily. "Pooh! as if the darling mum would break her heart as long as you, Rosie, and I were safe and sound. Confound it, Maurice, you ought to know her better. You and I may feel bitterly that she may have to forego luxuries she has been accustomed to; but she!—why, she'd laugh over bread and cheese, and insist upon it she preferred the rind in times of scarcity. No, no, old fellow, don't you fancy the mother can't take a facer." And Dainty gave his brother a bright, re-assuring smile.

But Maurice had no answering smile to give back. He knew—God help him!—that he was telling but a small half of the truth. He knew as well as Dainty that those two women he so loved would face ruin honestly come by as bravely as need be; could hold their heads high, and confront the world gallantly enough in such case. No weak, maudlin, hysterical women were they, but honest, true-hearted ones, who could share courageously the troubles of those they loved, and without moan for the disaster that had overwhelmed them. But disgrace! that was another matter. The haughtier the heads the lower they are bowed on such occasions, and none knew better than Maurice what proud, sensitive women were his mother and cousin.

"Well," he said, at last, "I'm not quite myself, Dainty. Things are going badly with us, I don't deny, but it may be that I magnify our difficulties. At all events, Laroom takes a much less despondent view of the situation than myself."

"Of course he does," said Dainty, sententiously. "You're hipped, out of sorts—liver out of order, probably. Take a run away somewhere, and leave Laroom to fight the battle out."

"Nice advice that, from a soldier," replied his brother. "Take leave of absence in the midst of the fray. Oh! Dainty, you to counsel me that!"

"No," replied the hussar, with much confusion, "of course I don't mean that. You're bound to stand to your guns for the present, but get change, Maurice, as soon as the crisis is over, whether it end in victory or defeat."

"Yes, I think I shall," replied the elder brother, slowly, as he rose, and again emptied his glass. "Good-bye. Don't forget, Dainty, you'll have to stand by me in the way I told you, if it comes to the worst. 'Tis you must break it to them at home."

"Depend upon me, and depend upon them. If I never have to break worse news to them than that, it's little I'll mind," replied Frank Ellerton. "Good-bye."

Dainty stood watching his brother from the club steps, as he walked rapidly away eastwards.

"I'm afraid, poor old fellow, he's gone a mucker. I never saw him pitch into champagne in that way before at luncheon. But, after all, the mother's got her jointure, Rosie's a young woman of large property, and there's sure to be something saved out of the smash. It can't be half so bad as he pictures it to himself."

And thus musing, he lit a cigarette, and commenced smoking with very tolerable satisfaction.





CHAPTER VIII.

USURIOUS INTEREST.

THERE are men—God help them!—educated men, in good positions—ay, moving in the best society—to whom all that is brightest and best in this world is a sealed book—to whom a fine poem, picture, or other work of art, is no more than its marketable value—who gauge all such productions, as merely a good investment, and who yet, notably in the matter of pictures, accumulate most valuable collections—men who get demonstrative only at cunning *entrées* or rare wines—whose idea of theatrical entertainment is limited to pretty faces and liberal display of those charms that puritanical views hold indecorous. Very ripe indeed these worshippers of “Our Lady of Pain” at this present.

Rolf Laroom was one of these men—earthiest of the earthly; but a man who bought plenty of pictures, old plate, old carving, old books, old china, and other articles of *vertu* as the year went round. He bought such things as mere speculations. To him they might have been calicoes, nutmegs, or other cargo; he bought for a rise, as he would have invested in any other promising-looking stock. But he was a shrewd man, and purchased under sound advice. He had made much money in this wise, and he had not invested that money in Ellerton and Company.

Mr. Laroom, too, had speculated both daringly and successfully in many other ways besides these. Such ventures he kept entirely to himself, and they had nothing to do with the firm in which he was really managing

partner. That firm Rolf Laroom had deliberately consigned to destruction, unless Rose Fielding should choose to ransom it. The failure of Ellerton and Co. would be a mere mercantile fiction as far as he was concerned. He had plenty of money invested in other names and in other countries with which to re-commence his career, that bankruptcy once got finished with. That bankruptcy is now imminent, and it rests entirely with Rolf Laroom whether it shall take place or not. That gentleman has gone closely into the affairs of the house in the last eight and forty hours, and has arrived at the conclusion that, between his own private resources and what assistance he can command in other places, Ellerton and Son are to be placed firmly on their feet again. He is perfectly aware that, if it was his interest to manage instead of mismanage the affairs of the firm, it is a sound, and easily to be made a thriving, business. He has counted up the costs on either side. He is willing to sacrifice some money, not so much, either, as will eventually be seen, for the attainment of his object—a goal so steadily kept in view these years past—the hand of that petulant child who scorned his love, who struck and taunted him that summer afternoon four seasons ago.

A curious mixture, this passion of his, bearing about equal proportions of love and hate. Coarse, sensual love for the girl's delicate beauty is blended with a fierce desire to stand to her in the light of lord and master. Laroom's conception of both love and matrimony is purely Asiatic. He holds a Mahomedan's creed on such points; and a man of his vindictive temperament is likely to exact a heavy reckoning for the blow that childish hand had dealt in its righteous wrath.

Better Rose Fielding should lie cold and still in her grave than find her third finger circled by a ring of this man's welding.

Mr. Laroom sits in his private room in King William Street, this Thursday morning, awaiting the coming of his chief. He is leisurely counting up the tricks in his hand, and looks upon the game as good as won.

"Of course he loves her—I know that; but what can come of his love when he is convicted of fraud, breach of

trust, etc.?" mutters the junior partner. "I should presume a man would sacrifice a lot of love to avoid conviction of felony. Then she—how can she say me nay when her cousin's good name—ay, even his liberty—her own fortune, and the fortunes of all she holds dearest, depend upon her answering in the affirmative. Bah! it is very simple. If Maurice Ellerton cannot, in his own interests, overawe any scruples she may entertain to start with—*ma foi!*" continued Laroom, with a shrug of his shoulders, "he richly merits transportation, or what other reward it is that embezzlement meets with in these islands."

Mr. Laroom's views of domestic polity were decidedly Eastern and autocratic.

"Well," he mused on the other hand, "if she dares to treat my advances with the contumely she once did—ah! we stand on a very different footing now, my little lady. Yes," he continued, as his face lowered into a heavy, malignant scowl, "I'll place your lover in the felon's dock, *ma mie*, and I'll make you and yours paupers in the land. You shall know silks and laces no more, but slop through the streets in draggled draperies. Ah! this other side of the picture has charms too. When I think of proud, haughty Mrs. Ellerton, who never deigned to treat me with more than distant politeness, in lodgings at Kentish Town, or some such locality, I fancy she will deem that she had done better to have welcomed Rolf Laroom more cordially to her roof."

Laroom's animosity to Mrs. Ellerton is perfectly unfounded. It proceeds from a cause common enough. Of lowly birth and doubtful credentials, he regards society ever with a jealous, scrutinizing eye. He imagines slights, conjures up insults, is on the *qui vive* for word or look of disparagement regarding himself. The man is cursed with enormous personal vanity, and conceives himself neglected, or treated with studied disdain, when he is not made much of; sensitive even then to the most trifling word or action that may jar against his inordinate self-esteem. There are plenty of people mixing in good society, with most undeniable credentials as regards birth and position, who voluntarily clothe themselves in this

garment of Nessus, and take upon themselves purgatorial pains in consequence.

Mrs. Ellerton had never fancied Mrs. Laroom. Her brave, true, honest woman's heart instinctively shrank from the coarser clay of which he was composed; but as a friend of her son's she had ever treated him with courtesy and consideration. Because she had not descended to tickle this man's vanity, he would exult in seeing her reduced from affluence to poverty.

It is well to be careful how you admit these earth-worms within your gates. It is seldom that, as in Laroom's case, they have power to sting, but their capability of spitting venom concerning you is always existent. A good deal of evil-speaking, lying, and slandering is done by these vain, morbid people in the course of a twelvemonth.

It had been Laroom who, in the early difficulties of Ellerton and Co., had insidiously suggested the raising a mortgage upon Miss Fielding's property. Blandly, gently, hesitatingly as he had insinuated it in the first instance, yet had he been perfectly prepared for the indignant rejection with which Maurice Ellerton met his proposition. But the money had to be raised—where could they obtain it so easily? What harm could it do Miss Fielding? It would be all paid back in a few months; they would be then through their difficulties, and Miss Fielding not a whit the worse for the assistance she had unwittingly afforded them. Were she old enough, indeed, to properly understand the case, would she not be only too glad to come to the assistance of those who had brought her up—loved and cherished her from childhood? Old Mr. Ellerton, in his weakness and senility, would sign anything Maurice put before him—indeed, did daily—trusting implicitly to his son.

“Non vi, sed sæpe cadendo,” quoth the Latin Grammar, does it not?—freely translated by the schoolmasters of a past generation, “Not by extreme violence, but by perpetual moderate flogging, or ‘dropping into’—is the classical dictum best inculcated to youth.” We know something about the power of friction in these days of railroads; and that the iron that will neither bend n

break, may be worn through in an inconceivably short space of time. The friction of Laroom proved too much for Maurice Ellerton, and in a luckless moment of desperation, the first mortgage of Rose Fielding's property was signed and negotiated by her trustees. But mercantile firms, like private individuals, once gotten into difficulties, are apt to remain there. Of course there are exceptions, but looking round upon one's individual acquaintance, we can only come to the conclusion that those of our friends whom we have once ascertained to be in that somewhat melancholy plight, are there yet, and likely to die in such circumstances. True, it don't seem to affect them much, though ever and anon come crises in their lives.

Ellerton and Co. were not destined to prove an exception. The Rubicon was crossed, the first step, that only one, the proverb tells us, that costs anything, was taken, and from thenceforth, as I said before, Rose Fielding's property became the milch-cow of that tottering firm. If you could analyse the feelings of a professor of petty larceny, I presume you would discover that all feeling of compunction ceased after the successful abstraction of the first pocket-handkerchief. The higher educated the man is, the better his position in this world, the longer I imagine would he be conscience-stricken at the iniquities he is committing. You see he has so much more to lose, to take a purely philosophical view of the case. Putting morality entirely upon one side, Mortimer Rumbold, the great city financier, and Jem Spraggs the costermonger, are not suffering quite in the same proportion, when finally atoning for their flagitious practices. Do not mistake me, and imagine for one moment I do not think it right and just it should be so. As his opportunities were so much greater in this world, so much less is there to be urged in extenuation of his fall. I only wish to point out that the lash of the law must sting the educated man more sharply than it does him who, bred in the kennel, drank in felony at his mother's breast, and has taken to criminal practices from his youth upward.

Mr. Laroom has made one slight error in his calcula-

tion. His jealous instinct has enabled him to discover Maurice's love for Rose Fielding, but he makes a mistake, as we know, when he deems him an accepted and favoured lover.

At last a clerk glides in and says Mr. Ellerton wishes to see him.

"Now for it," he mutters. "I expect him to wince; probably he'll not give in to-day, but of course he must eventually," and with this reflection, Laroom rose and obeyed the summons.

"How are you?" said Maurice, as he rose and shook hands. "Sit down there at once, and then tell me what you've done. Have you discovered a life-buoy?"

He spoke in nervous hurried manner, and the forced laugh with which he concluded jarred painfully on the ear. Not an inflexion of the voice, not a quiver of the mouth, was lost upon Laroom. It was in strong contrast to the nervous excitable tones of his chief that his steady deliberate response was made.

"You are over-sanguine, Ellerton. Scrapes like these are not settled quite so easily as an undergraduate's debts by a rich uncle."

"But you have done something?" exclaimed Maurice.

"No, indeed; but I have ascertained to some extent what it is possible to do. These people, Clinch, Grant, and Chillingly, hold mortgages on Miss Fielding's property to the amount of fifty thousand pounds. That fifty thousand pounds, the most urgent thing *you* have to deal with,"—and Mr. Laroom emphasized the pronoun strongly—"can be procured on certain terms. Not hard terms either, I should say, but still you may hesitate to subscribe to them. Another twenty thousand would see us fairly through the crisis. This also is, I think, to be procured, but requires a little further seeking for. I have not yet had time sufficient to devote to it."

Maurice Ellerton gave a great gasp of relief. There was salvation for the present, at all events. He clutched like a drowning man at this raft of safety, so vaguely held out to him.

"Who is it that is to find us this money?" he said at length. "And what are we to pay for it?"

"I intend to find the money," replied Laroom; "that is, upon certain conditions."

"You?" exclaimed Maurice, in unfeigned amazement.

"Even I! I have had many other irons in the fire, besides my share in Ellerton and Co. these last six years. I have prospered fairly, and though it won't leave me much behind, yet I can find this fifty thousand pounds."

Maurice looked almost incredulously at the speaker. Had this capital been acquired at the expense of the firm? He had right, he thought, to question the possession of so much money in the hands of one who some half-a-dozen years ago was but a clerk in their employ? No, his right was forfeited. Who was he now, to complain of fraudulent practices?

"And you are willing to advance this sum?" he muttered, at length.

"Yes, providing you give me the security I require."

"Confound it, man," muttered Maurice, impatiently, "who should know what security we can offer better than yourself?"

"True; but suppose I had discovered some further security, of which you have never taken note. How then?" inquired Laroom, with his dark eyes fixed keenly on his companion's face.

"I'd say you were a clever man. Take it and welcome," replied Maurice, "so you but see those infernal mortgages settled."

"You mean what you say? There is to be no reservation between us. If I find that fifty thousand pounds, I may claim the best security Ellerton and Co. can yield me for my money?"

"Of course: certainly," replied Maurice, nervously. He was beginning to feel a little afraid of his partner.

"Good. Then don't be annoyed if you find it something that may a little surprise you. If I advance that money, my security shall be Miss Fielding's hand." And Laroom leant quietly back in his chair.

"How do you mean? I don't understand you," replied Maurice, with a somewhat puzzled expression. He thought vaguely that Laroom aimed at something under Miss Fielding's own hand—deed, document, or what not. That

he was proposing to marry Rosie never for one instant crossed his mind.

Laroom winced as if cut with a whip. To a man of his jealous, morbid temper, nothing could have come so terribly home as Maurice Ellerton's utter want of comprehension of his meaning. His eyes gleamed for an instant with all the ferocity that lay latent in his nature. For a few seconds he felt that he could infinitely prefer that his offer should be rejected. It was rough abasement of the man's inordinate self-esteem—what they could not even imagine—his wishing to wed among them, these haughty merchant princes. That he could be guilty of such presumption, surpassed their understanding. Well, let them look to it. Rose Fielding's hand, or he would sweep Ellerton and Son away, like the house of cards that, but for him, they in reality were. He mastered his passion with a mighty effort, gulped down the fierce torrent of invective that rose to his lips. Had he not learnt early the advantages of self-control, Rolf-Laroom had never attained his present position. Then, in a voice that still shook a little from the violence of the storm that raged within him, he said quietly :

"Miss Fielding's hand in marriage is the price that I demand for my assistance in this matter."

"What!" exclaimed Maurice Ellerton, in the tones of a man who still doubted whether he heard aright—"you want to marry Rose Fielding?"

"Yes," returned the other, curtly, between his teeth, yet further stung by Maurice's somewhat contemptuously accentuated interrogatory.

"And have you any reason to suppose, may I ask," rejoined Maurice, his temples flushing, and speaking in those icy tones so well understood by society, "that Miss Fielding would accede to your request?"

"Miss Fielding, I presume, would consult the interests of those she holds dearest to her upon this occasion," replied Laroom, still manfully mastering the wrath within him. "It is no new story; girls marry every day to prop up their falling families."

Every vein in Maurice Ellerton's body tingled at his partner's cool, cynical speech. He was by no means cog-

nizant of the coarse, sensual, vindictive nature of the man he had to deal with; but the idea of his adored Rose handed over in mere mercantile fashion to such a man as Laroom, made his pulses beat tumultuously.

When two clouds, heavily charged with electricity, come into collision, thunder, lightning, and other wild ravages are usually the result. Two human beings, similarly impregnated, are wont also to discharge their petty lightnings and destructive tendencies on such occasions. More hopeful opportunity for angry, passionate storm, resolving itself, after the manner of humanity into fierce, malignant determination to do its worst possible to its neighbour, can be scarcely conceived than this present situation.

"But," said Maurice at length, in very measured tones, determined, if he can, to stifle the whirlwind within him, "what can be your object in wishing to marry Miss Fielding?"

Very stately indeed Maurice, as he puts this question, and emphasizing the "Miss" in manner unmistakeable.

"You want to know why I wish to marry Rose Fielding?" replied Laroom, with most deliberate intention, and laying a slight inflection on the Christian name. "I will tell you, somewhat curious that it has not already occurred to a business man, like yourself," and his lip curled in some slight derision. Well it might. Had Maurice Ellerton ever been a business man, he had never have stood in such grievous situation as he now does. As it is, he awaits Laroom's further speech with intense interest.

"I intend to be brief," continued the latter, "and therefore will not dilate upon the lady's charms or my own passion. But you must surely see that, if I wed Rose Fielding, in a few months more those estates are mine in right of my wife. I shall be simply paying off mortgages on my own property. I get the land for my money. Virtually, I am only changing my investment. I wish to be candid with you. When Miss Fielding, being my wife, obtains her majority, Ellerton and Co. will owe me fifty thousand pounds for taking up these mortgages. Now half of that money I must raise, and that the firm shall, at its convenience, refund to me; as regards my own

moneys, we will consider that debt cancelled, in consideration of the property I shall acquire with my intended bride."

Maurice listened passively and attentively, and, when the speaker had finished, he thoroughly grasped the audacity of his scheme; then Maurice Ellerton's blood once more surged furiously through his veins. Deep-laid, indeed, had been Laroom's calculation.

"Ellerton and Son," he replied, bitterly, "can have no words to express their thanks. You propose to find twenty-five thousand pounds yourself, to assist in raising twenty-five thousand more, and the price of this assistance is to be the hand of a high-bred beautiful girl, and landed estates worth close on eighteen hundred a year! In the annals of usury I don't think I ever met with anything more iniquitous! To speak roughly, and leaving the lady out of the question, you demand at least seventy-five thousand pounds within the twelvemonth for the loan of twenty-five, and your assistance to raise a further twenty-five. Do you think, Mr. Laroom, I am mad to buy money at this price?"

"I think you will be mad if you don't," replied the other, drily. "Allow me to call your attention to two points that seem to have escaped you. The unpleasantness of appearing in the felon's dock, in the first place; and, secondly, that this usurious profit is not to be paid by you."

"Good God! sir, and do you think that I would sacrifice Rose Fielding's interests to save myself?" cried Maurice, vehemently.

A sardonic smile wreathed Laroom's lips as he replied slowly:

"What a man has once done it is but fair to conclude he may do again. You have not shown yourself so sensitive concerning Miss Fielding's interests in the past."

"Good heavens, no!" cried Maurice, as, sinking into a chair, he buried his face in his hands, and almost cowered in his self-abasement. In his fierce excitement the fact had, for the moment, escaped him. What right had he to attack Laroom? He, at all events, proposed to give something for the plunder he wished to obtain: but he,

Maurice Ellerton, had abstracted all this money without giving any consideration for its use whatever. He shrinks conscience-stricken at the great wrong he has done this girl, whose interests are entrusted to his charge. She, too, whom he would have sooner died than bring sorrow upon! At what sacrifice of himself would he not make her reparation, were that possible!

And now suddenly comes before his mind the picture of Rose Fielding as this man's wife—this man who makes no scruple of trading on his knowledge of another's crime to obtain his ends; who proposes to purchase his wife and her belongings as a good and lucrative investment, and expects that he, Maurice Ellerton, will aid and abet him in such a sacrilege, for the saving of his own miserable self! No! let Ellerton and Son perish!—let all who are nearest and dearest to him go down in that shipwreck, midst all the agony and tears his shame must bring upon them; better all that than that his bright saucy Rosie should be the bride of such a man as Laroom.

The latter sits silently watching, trying to fathom his companion's thoughts. "My game is to wait," thinks Mr. Laroom. "That last remark must have been very hard to swallow, will take some time to digest; we will see what comes of it."

Suddenly Maurice raised his head. Very white his face now, and his lips tremble as he speaks.

"And do you suppose, sir—have you any grounds for supposing—that Miss Fielding would assent to such a proposal on your part?"

"Most assuredly. Miss Fielding will probably understand, when you explain it to her, how much *her* interests are involved in entertaining my proposition favourably. My experience of women teaches me that they are pretty keenly alive to such points."

His experience! Yes, such women as had smiled upon Laroom's love, if that be the right name for it, were doubtless very much alive to their own interests.

"But supposing," continued Maurice, with forced calmness, speaking indeed through his set teeth almost, "Miss Fielding should think fit to decline the honour of your hand?"

"Then I should imagine, in your very *peculiar* position, you will be at no loss for arguments with which to make her reconsider her decision," sneered Laroom.

"And do you dare to presume, sir, that I would use my influence, or counsel her to give her hand to a low-bred hound like yourself?" exclaimed Maurice, with blazing eyes, and all control utterly lost.

"Pooh! don't talk heroics to me," retorted Laroom, brutally. "You made no bones about negotiating her property. It is little use having a fit of spasmodic virtue about negotiating the sale of the girl herself. Pshaw!" he continued, rising, "there have been love passages between us before this. Don't think to impose——"

What more he might have said is for ever gulfed in the stream of Time, for at this juncture a walking switch, that lay upon the table in dangerous proximity to Maurice's fingers, fell with all the force Ellerton could master across his cheek.

"Liar!" thundered Maurice, literally trembling with passion.

For a second Laroom was half blinded by the blow; then he sprang like a tiger at his assailant's throat. They closed; a short, fell, fierce struggle, in which not a word was spoken, no sound but the labouring breath and the trampling of their feet; and then, as Maurice uttered a furious execration, Laroom, with a heavy crash, came to the ground.

"I've half a mind to trample the miserable life out of you!" said Maurice, in hoarse savage tones, such as men use when they tremble on the verge of murder; and in his rage he struck his adversary with his open hand once more upon the cheek.

For a few seconds Laroom lay motionless, his adversary standing menacingly over him. Then Maurice walked contemptuously away, and Laroom slowly got up, and wiped away the blood that trickled down his face.

He said never a word till his hand was upon the door, then turned with a lurid light in his eyes:

"I've two blows to reckon for, Maurice Ellerton," he said, in a thick unnatural voice, and with a face distorted by passion. "The first I received four years ago; the

second just now. They shall be paid in full before many days are over. You I consign to a felon's doom. As for Rose Fielding, I will ruin her, and every soul connected with her!"

"I ask no mercy for myself," replied Maurice haughtily—"do your worst. You did but get your deserts. As for Miss Fielding, I see no cause that your vengeance should fall upon her."

"Her accursed white hand struck well-nigh as hard as yours, in days gone by, because I stole a kiss from her prudish lips. I told you there had been love-passages between us," he continued, with a ferocious smile. "She shall pay well-nigh as dear as you for her peevish behaviour. I'll deprive her of silks, laces, equipage, ornaments, and all that women hold dearest."

Suddenly, like a lightning flash, came an inspiration across Maurice Ellerton. His face was irradiated with triumph, as he replied, in clear, ringing tones:

"Rose Fielding, Laroom, lies beyond your power. Not a lace, not a glove, not a toy can you deprive her of. For me, I am at your mercy, and scorn to ask grace at your hands. Be quick in your vengeance. You'd scarce let the cut on your cheek heal, I should fancy, ere it were gratified. Go." And Maurice pointed authoritatively to the door.

A menacing gesture of his hand, and Laroom was gone.





CHAPTER IX.

A SUPPER AT UPWAY.

“**F**OR my part, never can understand why a man falls in love, and heartily give him credit for so doing, never mind with what or whom,” says one of our greatest satirists. There is one occasion, though, upon which, with all due deference, I think he deserves but little credit—such a very everyday occasion, too, moreover. I mean when he falls in love with himself. And men do it, in their different ways, continuously and habitually, railing meanwhile at the vanity of women. It is curious why we all cherish this same passion of vanity. As Rousseau says somewhere, there never was man yet who did not derive more pain than pleasure from it, unless he were a fool. Are our sisters more fortunate, think you?

But there was never any rule yet without an exception, and if ever there was a man to whom no credit is due for falling in love, it is Mr. Weaver. He has a faculty for it. He catches love as others catch cold. 'Tis chronic with him. He commenced in the nursery, and has suffered under it from his youth up. He has experienced severe complications of the disorder, and is familiar with the inconveniences of having his heart torn asunder. A house divided against itself, we are told, cannot stand. Mr. Weaver would have confided to us that a heart divided into three pieces also could not stand the care, anxiety, and hot water that such great capacity of loving was wont to entail upon it. Mr. Weaver could no more have refrained

from making love to anything in petticoats than have paid his own or the nation's debts. Age or station was no check upon him. He'd have behaved with considerable *empressment* to his grandmother, and has a specialty for kissing maidservants. He tumbles in and out of scrapes of this nature with a facility all his own; and there is a story current of him in the corps, how, at a picnic once, the fatal propensity having got the better of him, the rival queens (for he had committed himself, as usual, in two places,) after exchanging preliminary shots, were thrown into convulsions of laughter by his half-pathetic, half-terrified, "Arrah, whist, me darlints!"

That such a susceptible youth could remain insensible to the fascinations of Jennie Holdershed's bright eyes and frank winning manner, was of course simply impossible. Mr. Weaver thinks there never was such a "darlint" as Jennie. He has had many a walk by the river; many a lesson in the art of fly-fishing from her, since we last saw them. He makes love to her, in his reckless, impulsive Irish fashion, furiously at times; and Jennie receives it all gaily and in good part. Very competent to take care of her heart on this occasion, in one way—not quite so well able to take care of it in another. Mr. Weaver is rapidly winning Jennie's heart, but, strange to say, he is not winning it on his own account. She likes him—likes his open, honest nature—likes him for himself; but what she likes him for best of all is his undisguised hero-worship of Dainty Ellerton. She has never any difficulty about making him talk of Dainty; the warm-hearted Irishman is never tired of chanting the praises of his schoolboy idol. He regards Dainty as the bravest, cleverest man he knows. We have all met such cases of youthful enthusiasm, and the world has not yet had time to weaken Tim Weaver's adoration for the hero of his boyhood. They get on wonderfully well these two. If Jennie laughs sometimes at his extravagant compliments and very pronounced protestations of affection, it is in merry genial fashion, that inflicts no wound upon his self-esteem; and her influence over him now is such that he would bear a good deal at her hands. He is very genuinely in love, but then he always is with some woman or

other ; still Mr. Weaver is harder hit upon this occasion than has been his lot hitherto.

Men of Mr. Weaver's mercurial temperament enjoy one inestimable advantage on such occasions. It never occurs to them to trouble their heads about the possible results of their love affairs. "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof." They pursue their flower-strewn paths utterly regardless of a forthcoming *dénouement* ; propose, when the situation demands it, with all due fervour and earnestness, with no more consideration regarding the ways and means necessary to matrimony than if they lived in Arcadia. And when prudent relatives intervene, and insist upon a termination of such folly, they go through all the agony of parting, suffer much sadness, and are probably sighing at some other fair one's feet before six weeks have gone over their heads. Woman's love, in some sort, is a necessity to them. If they are not capable of very deep attachment, yet are they desolate and lonely without some shrine to worship at ; still to these triflers at times comes a Nemesis, and they cross one woman, perchance, in the course of their lives, whom they never forget.

Mr. Weaver is sitting this autumn afternoon on the grassy knoll above the Nothe Fort, and looking dreamily over Portland Harbour. His eye falls lazily upon some half dozen huge iron-clads that lie anchored there ; but if you think Mr. Weaver is lost in admiration of the naval power of his country, and the might and majesty of those floating citadels, you are much mistaken. Mr. Weaver regards the Northumberland and Herculeses of the kingdom as admirably adapted for balls and private theatricals ; and when they are not fulfilling their destinies in this wise, troubles his head very little about them. Mr. Weaver is suffering from a complaint not uncommon in the army a few years ago—to wit, not quite knowing what to do with himself.

Mr. Weaver lights a pipe and proceeds to consider the subject in all its bearings.

"I'll go bail," he mutters, "I'd have very decent sport with the mackerel under the breakwater there, but it's hardly worth while to get a boat and start now. The day

Broken Bonds.

draws on, and it's a long pull, the wind against one too. Then I might drop down to the club, and have a cut in at pool, but the craythurs play mighty well some of them. It's hardly to be called a lucrative employment. Faith, I think I'd best tramp out to Upway, have a palaver with Jennie Holdershed, and come back by the train—ah, the sight of her sweet face is worth the walk to a man with a wooden leg even! The hair of her," mused Mr. Weaver in amorous meditation; "she might sit on it if she let it down, and the eyes of her, shure they're light enough to read by; and then the whole of her, bedad, ther'd be small chance for any two of them in Weymouth, if the apple had to be given away again." With which classical reflection Mr. Weaver rose and descended into the town.

Weymouth is rather jubilant this afternoon, for has not "the dread artillery" of the Nothe Fort given vent to its terrible thunder, and are not the windows of Weymouth none the worse for it? The prim little watering-place might be likened to the timid proprietor of a magnificent but ferocious dog, which he both admires and dreads. Weymouth is very proud of that bristly, pugnacious-looking fort that protects her harbour; but whenever the Nothe intimates its intention of trying its guns seaward, then does Weymouth quiver and quake for its windows! The lovely bay, dotted with tiny yachts and pleasure-craft, glitters 'neath the fierce autumn sun, as Mr. Weaver tramps at a swinging pace steadily up the esplanade. Not many people on the latter at present, it is too hot, and Weymouth waits till the sun is low to turn out and promenade. But it will be thronged thick enough in another two or three hours, when the wandering minstrels of the seashore make their appearance, and attract crowds to listen to the touching stories of "The Fancy Bazaar," etc.

Thickly sprinkled are the sands even now with children in all the utter *abandon* and ecstasy of childhood at the sea-side—dabbling, paddling, swimming boats, digging, delving, burying each other in the sand. Dirty, getting dirtier, ruining clothes past all redemption, but oh, so happy! Drinking in health with every breath, and, when

carrying their little flushed, sunburnt faces, disordered curls, and unheard of appetites home,—too late for tea to a certainty. You can't be in time at the seaside. It's a Bohemian existence, of irregular meals and contempt for conventionalities. I don't call Brighton or Scarborough "sea-side." Vanity Fair by the salt waters describes them.

Mr. Weaver, who, notwithstanding the pre-occupation of his heart, has still a critical eye for the nursery-maids, pursues the even tenor of his way, with no further delay than one or two well-favoured girls of that class justify. He rejects briefly the pressing invitation of a friend who is lounging on the benches fronting the club-house, and who, hailing him as "Tim, you devil!" suggests a game of pyramids; passes St. John's Church, and stretches away up the Dorchester Road. A trifle over the hour, and he pauses for a little beneath the grateful shade of the trees that overhang the "Wishing Well." He seats himself on a rocky fragment there, and feasts his eyes on the clear crystal waters, as they run gurgling, rippling, wantonng, and whispering to themselves, while the beech, ash, and maple bend lovingly over them.

It is all so quiet and peaceful, after the glare and life of the Weymouth sands, that no wonder he sits gazing lazily at it. Not a sound but the ripple of the stream, the faint plashing of the adjacent mill-wheel, the low querulous twittering of the small birds, and the soft cooing of the ringdove. Suddenly the Naiad of the Spring is at his side, the elfish Nance, her unkempt locks tumbling about her ears, and her glittering black eyes dancing with merriment. She and Tim are intimate friends, and the queer, wayward child has conceived a strong attachment for the young Irishman. His good-nature and *bonhomie* have much attraction for her. Too often, poor little waif, did she suffer contumely and sarcasm from the visitors to the Well, when she proffered her tumblers. It was not in Tim Weaver to be unkind to anything, much less to women or children. Then there was another bond between them. Nance believed implicitly in the efficacy of those waters to fulfil the wish of any one who drank them with faith and reverence; and Tim, who had a strong dash of supersti-

tion in his nature, the result of that wild western blood that ran within his veins, and the strange legends of banshees, "the good people," etc., that he had been familiarized with from his cradle, shared, or pretended to share, in that belief. Nance was never so delighted as when she could succeed in drawing some such legend from her friend's lips, and would sit at times, to Jennie's intense amusement, with starting eyes and open mouth, while Mr. Weaver narrated some fairy-tale of Connemara for her delectation.

"You'll want a drink after your walk," said Nance gaily, as she held out a glass to him. "Cool your lips, and see what the Spirit of the Well will do for you."

"Ah! Nance, it's yourself there, is it? Yes, colleen, fill the tumbler; I'm destroyed with the hate. Is Miss Jennie at home?"

"I think so. You'll find her up at the cottage. There, don't forget to wish. I would like to hear you wish, but if you tell me, you know it'll come to nothing. 'She,' " continued Nance, gravely, and pointing into the waters, "never grants anything to tattlers. You must wish, believe, and hold your tongue, and then, if it's good for you, 'She' will give it you."

Nance designated the nymph of the fountain by various titles. To visitors she generally called her "the Lady of the Well," occasionally "the Spirit," but to her intimates Nance invariably spoke of her as simply "She."

Poor little pagan! Her belief in "the Lady of the Well," and her passionate devotion to Jennie Holdershed, constituted the sole poetry of her miserable existence. A brutal, drunken father, an invalid, querulous mother, hard work, hard words, hard usage, little to eat, and stripes in lieu of sympathy—such was Nance's home. She said no more than the truth when she declared that, but for Jennie's tender, womanly nursing, she should have died. Yes, like hundreds more, not from want, but from mere want of care. We can fancy what nursing the poor, fever-stricken girl had got in that home of hers but for Jennie Holdershed.

"Do you know," said Nance, seating herself by her visitor's side, and speaking very confidentially, "I think

I heard some of 'the good people' you were telling me about at work in the wood the other night. There are 'good people' in these parts as well as in Ireland, shouldn't you think?"

"Divil a doubt of it, Nance," replied Mr. Weaver, solemnly; "but ye see, it's not aisy to make their acquaintance at all. They're mighty capricious, and they needn't show themselves av they don't choose."

"But then," said Nance, gravely, "how is it any one ever does meet with them?"

"Well, you see," replied Mr. Weaver, "sometimes they require assistance from us mortals. Sometimes they take it into their heads to do us a turn; and sometimes you come upon them unawares, and then the crathures are bound to be dacent and polite, av you don't cross them. Faith!" continued Mr. Weaver, with a comic twinkle of his eye, "a little lady like yourself, that does barmaid as it were to 'Her,'"—and here Mr. Weaver made a motion of his walking stick towards the gurgling waters at their feet—"would scarce require an introduction."

"But I can't meet them," cried Nance, earnestly.

"Och! may be ye will before long. It's when you're laste thinking of them that they always turn up."

"Then you think I shall some day?" inquired the child.

What Mr. Weaver's answer might have been, it is impossible to record; for the best of all reasons—it was never made. For at this juncture, a rough, boisterous voice above their heads trolled out,

"A plague of those musty old lubbers,
Who tells us to fast and to think,
A patient, fall in with life's rubbers,
With nothing but water to drink!"

There came a crash and a stumble, as of some one nearly on his head.

"A curse on these narrow channels! Why the"—explosive, etc., etc., etc.,—"don't they buoy such a d---d narrow roadway as this?"

"A can of good stuff, had they twigged it,
'Twould have set them for pleasue agog,

And spite of the rules
Of the schools,
The old fools,
Would have all of e'm swigged it;
And swore there was nothing like grog."

"Oh, bother it!" exclaimed Nance; an expression of most ineffable disgust spreading over her elfish features. "Here comes the Captain, and I looked forward to a long talk with you about 'the good people.' But I shall find them, never fear; perhaps 'she' will help me. Thanks!"

And clutching the sixpence Tim Weaver slipped into her hand, the child sped across to her home just opposite.

Another moment and, with face all aglow, his telescope under his arm, his coat carried across his shoulder, and Captain Holdershed appeared. He hailed Mr. Weaver with a jolly laugh and most demonstrative shake of the hand, for Tim was a prime favourite with the bibulous veteran.

"Ha, ha, sir, delighted to see you!" exclaimed the Captain, mopping his rubicund visage with an enormous China silk pocket-handkerchief. "You'll come up and take a bite with us, of course. Jennie will be main glad to have a clack with you. Desperate work that long range practice surely. I was looking through my glass this morn'g, and I'm blessed if I didn't see a fishing-boat cut clear in two by 'em. You wouldn't hear anything about it in Weymouth, I suppose?" concluded the Captain, interrogatively.

"Divil a syllable!" returned Mr. Weaver, sententiously, and quite agreeing meanwhile with his host about what "desperate work this long range practice was."

"No, I'd fancy not. There isn't a glass in the place fit to look through. But I saw it, distinctly. She was a long way out. Three men aboard of her. I couldn't quite make 'em out—that was beyond even my glass; but one of 'em had on a scarlet nightcap, with a blue tassel, I think. You might make inquiry about the harbour, and over Portland side, if there was any poor fellow out with his head thatched in that fashion. Sad, very sad, to think of three poor fellows gone to Davy Jones without a

minute's warning. It makes me quite low; I feel as if I wanted something."

Mr. Weaver was now perfectly aware of the Captain's talent for "poetic figments," though he had been somewhat deceived by it in the early days of their acquaintance. He knew what marvellous sights were to be beholden by the veteran through his own telescope. His hearers might have frequently exclaimed, in the words of the American bard,

"Do I sleep—do I dream?
Do I wonder and doubt?
Are things what they seem,
Or is visions about?"

Mr. Weaver, too, as far as his experience went, had no recollection of a time when the Captain didn't feel as if he "wanted something." So that upon the whole he was not so much upset by that ancient mariner's story as might have been supposed.

Captain Holdershed, once delivered of this affecting incident that his eyes had seen, seemed to throw it entirely on one side. His only further allusion to it was upon arrival at the cottage, when he walked straight to the cupboard, and while his niece greeted Mr. Weaver, took advantage of that circumstance to mix a modified edition of brandy and water, known in his bibulous vocabulary as a "stiffner." This coming within Jennie's notice, she shook her head at him in admonitory fashion.

"Must, my dear, must," replied the Captain, acknowledging the signal. "Just seen a most horrible sight. 'Here to-day, gone to-morrow.' 'Sweet little cherub that sits up aloft,' not on the lock-out, you know. Poor fellows, poor fellows!" and the Captain buried his face in the tumbler.

"Now, Mr. Weaver," said Jennie, with a bright smile, "of course you are going to stop supper with us. I say you must, and you know you always do what I tell you;" and Jennie concluded with one of her own peculiar, quick little authoritative nods.

Supper is finished, and the Captain and Mr. Weaver are engaged in the consumption of tobacco. Jennie sits with them, her little fingers engaged in no tatting or crochet-

work, active as they are withal. Jennie is making herself a landing-net—small reverence has Jennie for what she contemptuously terms old woman's work.

“Time enough to take to the knitting-needles, and such like gear, when I have to bide all day by the fireside; when my limbs get stiff, my eyes grow dim,” quoth Jennie. “Have you heard anything lately of Mr. Ellerton?” she inquired, as she stooped to adjust the stirrup of her netting.

“No!—sorrow a bit I’ve heard of Dainty this long while,” replied Mr. Weaver, “bar what the papers have told me.”

“And what was that?” said the girl, lifting her head, quickly.

“Mighty little! I saw he rode three or four races at Stockbridge, but he didn’t win. They must have been real bad bastes, or Dainty’d never have been behindhand,” replied Tim, loyally.

“Then you don’t know how he is?”

“Och! he’s right enough! Nothing’s ever the matther with Dainty. You see, there can’t be, Miss Jennie. He’s the true grit in him. What’d kill some folks, wouldn’t be any sort of consequence to Dainty.”

“Ah! you mean he’s strong,” said Jennie, raising her handsome head and gazing keenly at her *vis-à-vis*.

“Sthrong is it! No, that’s not what I mane exactly. It’s the divil of him! There’s plinty die, Miss Jennie, just for want of that same; poor craythurs, they think they’re departed av their finger aches. But,” and here Mr. Weaver lowered his voice, “it’d be mighty hard to convince Dainty he was dead—such is the pluck of him!”

Jennie’s merry laugh called Mr. Weaver’s attention to the incongruity of his remark.

“Ah! faith, it’s funning ye are, and making game of what I’m telling ye! But it’s truth, all the same. It’s the wakeness of your Anglo-Saxon understhanding. Troth! ye’ve none iv ye any poethry in your composition. I’ll have to descend to plain prose to make you comprehend me.”

Here a subdued growling in the corner became more and more audible; various strong expletives, from which at

times rose to the surface phrases such as may bear to be recorded, as—"cocknified dandy," "kid-gloved, kid-livered nincompoop," gave the speaker to understand that the gallant Captain was fuming, fretting, and by no means a participator in Mr. Weaver's eulogy of his absent friend.

"What's the matter, uncle?" cried Jennie, gaily. "I'll have none of your rumbling in the corner there! Let's hear the worst—what is it?"

The veteran was taken somewhat aback, as he often was, by his frank, downright niece's attacks. But he was a mighty master of fiction, and seldom to be caught without rejoinder of some sort.

"Matter?—hum! Why, that cursed girl has sent in the water only half hot, and the"—expletive, etc., etc.,—"sugar won't melt!"

"Arrah! Caqtain dear!" cried Mr. Weaver, "ye've only to get Miss Jennie just to look at it, an' if it don't melt, thin it must be chalk, not sugar, ye've got in the tumbler. Something quite insinsible to the rays of light or phosphoric influences."

"Mr. Weaver," laughed Jennie, menacing him with her netting needle, "it's time for you to go. When you make such desperate assaults on my woman's vanity, I feel there's no safety but in flight. Besides," she continued, dropping her badinage, "you really haven't much more than time to catch the train."

"Ah, now," responded Tim, putting into that exclamation what only an Irishman can. "Isn't it our privilege to admire the sun, the moon, and all that shines upon this earth—bright eyes and beauty included?"

"Go, go, Mr. Weaver!" cried Jennie, laughing. "I mean to shine no longer to-night. I dare not face such insidious flattery."

"You can't go without a parting glass, shipmate," suddenly exclaimed the Captain, in triumphant tones.

"Sick or well, late or early,
Wind foully or fairly,
Helm a-lee or a-weather,
For hours together,
I've constantly swigged it,
And dam'me there's nothing like grog."

“ ‘ And dam ‘ me there’s nothing like grog,’ ” chorused the veteran, in hoarse, boisterous reiteration.

“ Ah ! well, there’s not going to be any more to-night,” said Jennie, laughing as she swooped down upon the brandy-bottle.

“ I say, young woman, you put that down again,” said the Captain, angrily.

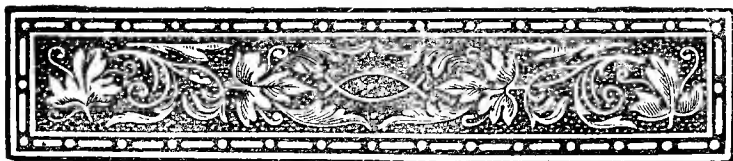
“ Not till to-morrow night, my uncle,” replied Jennie. “ Good night, Mr. Weaver.”

A quick, bright little nod, and Jennie was gone.

“ Well, I’m d——d ! ” said the Captain, staring glazily at the door his niece had vanished through. “ Look here, young fellow, I like you—you’re (hiccup) good sort o’ young fellow. You—you—you understand’ nor’-westers. Take my a’vice—never tol’rate a woman inside your house. They’re mean, that’s what th’ are. They’re the most ‘tankerous, dis’gree’ble—cats ever came in a man’s home. They—they’d—— What I mean is, you s’see—they’re always car’ring on. Good night. Mind never marry—quite absurd. As if a man didn’t know besht what a man wan’st ! ”

“ What an ould baste ! ” soliloquised Mr. Weaver, as he walked away towards the railway station.





CHAPTER X.

"REVENGE IS THE CUD THAT I DO CHEW."



WHEN Laroom regained his own home, after his quarrel with Maurice Ellerton, he was well-nigh delirious with passion. He cursed his servant because dinner was a trifle late. He raged inwardly during the whole of that meal. That once disposed of, and he paced the room tempestuously. No more thought of love for Rosie now. No, his heart was all aflame for revenge. He thirsted for the destruction of the whole Ellerton family. To consign Maurice to a felon's doom would by no means appease his malevolence—they must be ruined, disgraced, root and branch. He even execrated the night, because it compelled him to defer his deep-laid schemes till the morrow.

For it had occurred to Laroom all along that he might have to solace himself with revenge instead of love. Indeed, even his fierce desire of attaining Miss Fielding's hand was based far more upon the former passion than the latter. He had fancied how delicious it would be to have the power of bowing that fair head to the dust, of commanding that delicate hand, that had smitten him in its anger, to make music for him—ay, to caress him, to make the blue eyes fill with tears when the whim seized him. As was before said, he was Asiatic in his views of

women, and such gross, sensual love has ever a strong tinge of tiger-like ferocity blended with it—quite capable of murder when irritated; and Rolf Laroom was just the man to have tortured a sensitive woman deliberately to death. No such death as the law takes cognizance of; but men of Laroom's type can kill quite as surely, without running risk of indictment for murder, when their victim is a high-souled woman, and tied to the stake.

"Yes," he muttered, between his clenched teeth, as he paused for a moment in his restless walk, "the machinery is all in gear, and to-morrow I set it in motion. You are like to pay dear, Maurice Ellerton, for this day's work. Fool! the one man alive who could have saved you, you've dared to strike." And mechanically he put his hand to his face, and then looked impatiently into the glass. A visage working with passion met his angry gaze. A dark, livid line down the cheek marked where the stroke of Maurice's cane had fallen, and a cut, swollen upper lip, reminiscence of their brief struggle, contributed no whit to improve his good looks, while, as he thus confronted himself, his face still tingled with the recollection of that contemptuous blow from Maurice's open hand.

A savage execration again escaped him, and, exhausted by his own passion, he sank into a chair. He was literally shaking from head to foot with the violence of his emotions, and lay back in his seat for a few minutes to recover himself.

"This won't do!" he muttered again uneasily at last. "I shall want a clear head to-morrow. A few days more, and I intend that all those mortgages on Miss Fielding's property shall be virtually in my own hands—nominally, of course, they can't be. Am I not bound to go down in the wreck of Ellerton and Son?" and Laroom sneered at the thought of how little that was to affect him in reality.

"Yes, the ship has been scuttled some time," he continued: "it is but opening the leaks. I've not studied commercial piracy all these years for nothing; and when Ellerton and Son is safely gulfed in the troubled waters of

bankruptcy, I shall be the comfortable owner of Miss Fielding's estate. A couple of years abroad, till things have a bit blown over, and then I play the country squire. Not an error in my calculations," mused Mr. Laroom, as he filled himself out a huge bumper of port. "No; I have sworn, if Rose Fielding made not amends for that insult of four years ago, this thing should happen, and it shall. I risk not only all I have in the world on it, but all I can by any possible means borrow. It would be ruin should this stroke fail—utter, irremediable ruin. But it can't; my plans are too surely laid. Yet what could put it into Maurice Ellerton's head to say that Rose Fielding should never be a lace or a shoe-string the worse for the impending smash? He must know that our bankruptcy means the foreclosing of all those mortgages; yet something of that kind he did assuredly say at the last. I was too excited to take exact note of his words. Fool that I was to lose my temper! Just possible I might have carried my point. No, never! one count more against you, my friend, that you did make me forget myself." And again Laroom's cheek burnt as he thought of that afternoon's interview and its stormy termination.

A man this with fierce, unappeasable revenge flaming in his breast—with an accumulation of long-nurtured wrongs and deeply brooded-over slights, imaginary both for the most part, tugging at his heart-strings. An unscrupulous, malicious man, with no spark of generosity irradiating his mean, vindictive nature. And in the hollow of this man's hand apparently lies the future of the Ellertons, all his lower and more brutal passions brought into fiercer activity than ever by that scene transacted in the King William Street counting-house, which we have already witnessed. Of a verity there is sore pre-sage of grief and calamity impending over the house of Ellerton!—shame, bitter wailing, and misery, such as can only be wrought by those who, near and dear to us, sign the bond of the arch tempter, and deliver themselves over, body and soul, to the Lord of darkness and desolation.

Very little romance is there about Rolf Laroom, and yet it is the strong vindictive natures of such men that have given rise to some of the most notable romances of our days.

Mr. Laroom is up by times the next morning, and away into the city with the earliest opening of the business day; more resolute than ever to precipitate the downfall of Ellerton and Co. That blue, livid streak down his cheek, which he was compelled to contemplate while shaving, is not calculated to soften the animosity which sways his soul. Very busy indeed is Mr. Laroom this morning, selling, negotiating, and borrowing; diving in and out of various musty little counting-houses, in which, for all their insignificant appearance, money is turned over and over, like so much hay in the bright summer sunshine. Got in, too, at times, and stacked in considerable quantities. Fortunes constantly made in those dingy, cobwebby rooms; somewhat questionably, to boot, in one or two of those patronized by Mr. Laroom. For there are pirates in the city, as in most other places, that hold forth promise of plunder to the unscrupulous; and Mr. Laroom had a somewhat piratical connexion. Affiliated to the vulture, this man, with unerring scent for the picking of the bones of defunct companies, or the battenning on the difficulties of luckless speculators. Tolerably well known indeed to those who make it their business to thrive upon the entanglements of their fellows, let them take what shape they may. And this was another side of Rolf Laroom's character, utterly unsuspected by Maurice Ellerton.

Mr. Laroom's countenance brightens as the day wears on; his dark eyes sparkle with undisguised satisfaction; things are evidently progressing as he would wish them, and when, a little after four, he turns westward, a fierce, triumphant smile illumines his face, as he mutters, "A few days now, and I'll spread desolation and mourning through the house of Ellerton—a few days more, and I shall be the virtual holder of all those mortgages, and shall foreclose at once. That topples over Ellerton and Son, and consigns Maurice to obloquy and a prison for fraud and breach of trust. And who is to guess that Simmonds,

the nominal possessor of all those bonds, holds no more than ten thousand pounds of those fifty thousand pounds' worth of mortgages—that he is the puppet, that I pull the strings—that a girl's delicate hand, four years ago, struck the first nail into the coffin of the firm of Ellerton and Son?"





CHAPTER XI.

CONFESSION.

MAURICE ELLERTON all this time is living a life well-nigh unsupportable. True, he has been to a certain extent somewhat easier since he has learnt that the crash is unavoidable—that his sin shall find him out—that his shame shall be in the mouths of all men. He is easier, in the same way as the drowning man when, his death agony ceasing, he no longer struggles against his destiny. He is easier because he has made up his mind to his doom. He has settled with himself in what wise it is to be confronted. But, all the same, it is with feverish impatience that he awaits the knell that is to consign him to oblivion from henceforth—the first burst of the storm that is to engulf him, the first echo of that fiery tongue that is to drive him out scathed, branded, crime-stricken—an outcast from the world in which he has as yet lived.

The moments of supreme agony are those which intervene between the departure of hope and the inevitable. Highest torture of a shameful death are those few seconds when the pinioned victim is left alone on the drop, ere the bolt is drawn. What the feelings of the doomed man may be, can be pretty well conceived; they have all an intense desire to know “when it is coming.”

Maurice Ellerton knows full well that the ground is mined beneath his feet, that the crash is a mere question of days, that nothing can avert it. He has not seen Laroom since the fierce conflict between them, but he has

received a note from him, couched in curt hostile language.

"Our meeting again, after what has passed," writes Mr. Laroom, "is impossible. That I should withdraw from the firm is imperative, but my withdrawal, until we are declared bankrupt, is equally impracticable. That this is any source of inquietude to me I make no pretence; I am well content to see the house perish, even if my own fortunes are wrecked thereby. I have the satisfaction, at all events, of seeing you brought to the dust, and shall at least come out of the affair with clean hands, which you cannot hope to do. I shall be ruined, but no charge of fraudulent embezzlement can be laid against my door. You, I fancy, will find it hard to evade such imputation, still harder to convince a jury of your countrymen that your deeds do not merit penal servitude. As far as the business management of the house goes, I will continue to conduct it, or leave it to you; it is matter of little moment for the few days that are left to it. You have only to bear in mind that the receiving of large sums, when all is up, goes against you in the Bankruptcy Court. I give this piece of advice entirely in my own interest, you may rely therefore upon its integrity."

Maurice's sole answer to this was: "Do what you will. I would I had no more to repent than my treatment of you yesterday."

If it made things no worse for Maurice, this *carte-blanche* assuredly made Laroom's delicate game easier to play. It enabled him to put off their suspension of payment some few days longer, till, in fact, his schemes were thoroughly ripe, till those mortgage deeds were in the hands of his tools. Laroom of course did so.

Maurice, meanwhile, can think of nothing now but how best to break all this forthcoming misery and disgrace to his mother and Rosie. No longer able to conceal from their keen loving eyes the agony of his soul—no longer able to bear their silent sympathy with his too evident trouble, Maurice has pleaded business, and, under pretext of a journey to Liverpool, established himself in lodgings in Berners Street. There he awaits the end; there night after night he sits silently smoking, gazing into the empty

grate, and meditating on how his disgrace is to be broken to his mother. At last it occurs to him that they must be got out of the way—induced to leave London. He fancies it will come less hard upon them if they should be living in some neighbourhood where they are not known; if the blow should come to them in an obscure watering-place, or, still better, in some quiet foreign town. But how are they to be got there, under what pretence are they to be carried out of the mighty Babylon? That is beyond him. Then, again, who is to go with them? Himself? Impossible; it would be to court the very thing he so wishes to avoid, arrest under their eyes. Yes, he thinks at last Dainty must do it; he must confess all to Dainty, and Maurice Ellerton shivers from head to foot as he comes to this conclusion.

Sad, very sad, is ever the confession of our iniquities to those we hold dear. Self-abasement before those in whose esteem we would fain stand highest, is a bitter cup to drain always. But when such confession is that of no petty sins, no heedless follies, verier verjuice it falls not to man's lot to swallow. To confess to the woman you love, to the woman who has been left to your protection, advice, and guidance, that you have stolen her money—can greater degradation be imagined? That Maurice Ellerton felt was all beyond him.

But could he bear to tell his crime to Dainty? He did not know. The idea had come into his head that Dainty could best soften the blow to those at home. Home! should he ever see that home again? No, he supposed not. What would they do to him?—imprisonment and a blasted name was the least he could expect. He thinks over these things night after night. He wanders about the streets thinking about them day after day, choosing ever quarters of the town strange and remote for his walks. He begins to entertain a strange sympathy with misery and crime, and regards with curious and critical eyes one or two of the streets running east from Drury Lane, the slums of Whitechapel, and the pestiferous stews of Shore-ditch. He wonders sometimes, as his gaze falls listlessly on the gaunt, wolfish, ragged forms that cross his path, whether he shall become such as they. Have they

memories and recollections of better and brighter times that they look lovingly back upon, in the rare intervals of the consciousness of their humanity ; or are they kennel-bred and apprenticed to crime from their youth—wolves from their birth, with fierce predatory instinct of self-preservation ?

And he !—he had no such excuse as these, no pretext that to live he had been necessitated to rob ; that to keep soul and body together there had been nothing for it but to prey upon those who had money ; that to procure food and shelter it behoved that something or some one should be plundered. No, these wild animals of the city were born to their vocation, nursed in rags and squalor, and taught nothing more than that to exist they must get money—the how being left to their own solution.

An American humorist has laid down that man's first instinct is to steal, his second to steal again. Whether he speaks in jest or earnest, I can't say, but that it is perfectly true of man in the abstract, I have no manner of doubt. The sense of *meum* and *tuum* is solely the result of education ; breach of which is regarded, in such haunts as I have been speaking of, simply "as bad for you, if you're found out."

Another morning, and still the Nemesis of crime holds her hand, the bolt yet quivering in her pitiless fingers. There is no consolation for him in this. He knows that it must fall, wishes feverishly that it had fallen. Another weary tramp through those parts of the seething city in which vice walks unabashed at noon-day, where murder and robbery rear their horrid front, and scarce reck the simulation of being other than they are. He cannot help it, his limbs mechanically carry him to these places. He has a morbid curiosity to look upon the children of crime. He shudders as he gazes, but ever recurs to him that same hideous idea, "Is he too destined to be such as they ?" To be degraded, brutalized into their likeness. He has heard of such things—of men well educated as himself, aye, of women too, who have sunk as low ; to whom no peace was left on earth, but such oblivion of the past as might be obtained through alcohol or opiate ; men who execrated the glorious gift of memory, and sought to

deaden it by every means in their power ; who ruthlessly and deliberately dulled the intellect God had given them, because they could no longer bear the sense of their utter degradation ; men who would fain tear the pages of the past from the book of their lives—who had no ray of light in their present, no gleam of hope in their future.

At times he speaks to some of these outcasts, picking out such as he conceives may have fallen, as he is about to do. He turns faint with horror when he finds that he has guessed aright. When he hears the unbridled ribaldry and coarse blasphemies that burst from lips which bear token of having been educated and trained to better things, his soul turns sick within him as again he wonders whether he too is destined to grovel in the mire. In his agony and abasement, he has so utterly lost all belief in himself, that he can conceive no depth that he may not descend to. He stands peering into the abyss, feeling that the nethermost darkness is as likely as not to be his portion. How do ruined men like himself, with a blasted character, live except by crime, is a question that he sometimes ponders over.

He comes home only to eat mechanically ; to wonder whether *it* will come to-morrow ; to muse over that impossible confession to Dainty, and yet he thinks that should be done, could he but muster up courage to do it. He takes out his blotting case and sits down ; but no ! the pen is paralysed in his fingers. To write the story of his shame is beyond him, Ha ! a thought strikes him—he will telegraph. He scribbles a line on a sheet of note-paper, rings the bell, and tells the maid-servant to run quickly with it to the nearest office. It wants but twenty minutes to eight. He gives a slight start as he hears the slam of the street door. He would recall it now, almost ; perhaps even yet it may be too late. He sits listening impatiently till the street bell announces the return of his messenger. Anxiously he summons her to his presence. Yes, she was just in time.

The die is cast, then ; to-morrow Dainty will be with him. To-morrow his shame will be known, at all events, in his own family. Weird and ghastly are the phantoms that haunt Maurice Ellerton's pillow. Fierce wolfish

faces, with gibbering blasphemous lips, peer out of the darkness. Unkempt, dishevelled, gin-drinking drabs point the finger of scorn. The gutter, the squalid tenements, and all the grim scenery of the haunts of crime, stand out clear and distinct in their hideous obscenity, while flapping their dusky wings vulture-like over all, hover the Avenging Sisters.

Dainty Ellerton, cigar in mouth, is attending stables in the South Cavalry barracks at Aldershot, looking with critical eye at the grooming of the horses of the troop with which he has the honour to be connected. Rather a labour of love this with Dainty, for he has a weakness on the subject of horse-flesh, and, moreover, does know something about it; a thing which by no means of necessity follows, although it is rarely an Englishman will acknowledge ignorance about anything connected with a horse. Dainty is absorbed at this moment in the solution of a somewhat knotty problem—a problem of very considerable consequence in his estimation—namely, how the Colonel is to be persuaded to cast off that long-backed soft-constituted brown mare into which there seems no possibility of putting either heart or condition. He and his Captain are engaged in very earnest conference on the point.

“There’s no making anything of her,” says Dainty, sententiously. “She won’t carry a coat. She’s a real bad-constituted, bad-plucked brute, that’s what she is; a disgrace to the troop and enough to take all the pride out of Jem Butler, who has the ill-luck to belong to her.”

“You’re quite right, Dainty, and I’ll have another shot at the chief about it the first opportunity. Halloo! here’s a telegram for somebody.”

“Which is Mr. Ellerton, please?” inquired the imp of the wire, as he brandished his yellow-tinted envelope.

“I am. Here you are!” said Dainty, as he extended his hand for the missive.

His face fell as he perused it. He would not have thought so much of it had it not been for that talk with Maurice at the Club. But now he felt assured that the

worst had come, little as he dreamed of what that worst was to prove. It was but a line.

"Come to me at once here. Things very serious. I want you much. Come straight here, mind."

That was all it said.

"But why is he at Berners Street?" mused Dainty. "I'm afraid, poor dear old fellow, it's an awful 'smash.' A nasty telegram, Stratton," he said, turning to his Captain, "and I must go to town at once. I suppose you will excuse my further attendance? I have only just time to change my dress and catch the up-train."

"Certainly," said the other. "Let us hope it may not turn out so bad as it sounds."

"Thanks, old fellow," said Dainty, as he hurried away.

But on his journey to town Dainty was sorely perplexed about how it was that his brother should be in Berners Street. Why was he there? What could be his reason for being there? He asked himself these questions over and over again, and the more he pondered over this mystery, the less Dainty liked it.

"Looks like lying by, and keeping dark," mused Dainty. "But if it's as bad as that, and Maurice is really 'wanted,' why, Berners Street's no use. He had better go abroad, poor old fellow, till things can be put straight a little. However, I shall know all about it pretty soon now; but I'm afraid it's a bad business. How cut up the mother'll be! Wants me to break it to her, very likely. That won't be a very nice mission to undertake. But he always stood to me, and, whatever the scrape, he shan't find me fail him. If he wants every copper I can lay hands on, it's his."

Waterloo Station is gained at last, and in another twenty minutes Dainty's cab pulls up at his brother's door in Berners Street. Mr. Ellerton was out, but he was to step in and wait, please. Mr. Ellerton said he shouldn't be long.

Dainty goes up-stairs and enters his brother's sitting-room. Just the usual bachelor apartment. Very few of Maurice's knicknacks or belongings lie about. It looks as if but temporarily tenanted. By no means a cosy room. It has the air of being habitually lived in. There are

but few signs to indicate the proprietor's tastes or habits. Dainty is not usually accessible to the occult influences such places exercise on more highly nervous organizations than his own. Yet at the end of a quarter of an hour the generally imperturbable hussar finds himself troubled with the fidgets. We must bear in mind that he has good reason to be anxious about his brother, and that he can discover nothing to wile away the time with. The sole books upon the table are "*Les Misérables*" and a copy of "*Le Lendemain de la Mort*," neither of which works is the least in Dainty Ellerton's line.

But Dainty is not the man to succumb to such an attack. He produces his panacea for all such nervous derangement, and calmly lighting a cabana, prepares to wait for an indefinite period. It was, perhaps, as well he did, for his cigar burns low before he recognizes his brother's step upon the stair.

As the door opens, Dainty throws his cigar into the grate, and advances to meet him; but even he stands aghast at the ruin that his late morbid thoughts have worked in Maurice Ellerton's face.

"'Tis very good of you, Dainty, but I knew you would come. You're not one to fail in need, or forget the old family motto, *Semper paratus*," said Maurice, as he extended his hand.

"No, old fellow; I'm here to do your bidding to the best of my small ability. But you don't look the thing at all, you know. What is the matter?"

"Ruin, Frank!" returned his brother; and, as he spoke, his face, pale enough before, turned to an almost ashy greyiness—"ruin, and beyond that disgrace—illimitable shame, not only in the eyes of men, but in mine own. Don't speak," he continued, hurriedly. "It has been in my mind to tell you all this for days, but my nerves failed me. I am ruined—that is little, but I am also a thief and a felon!"

Dainty Ellerton reeled as if he had been shot. Ruin he was prepared for, but not this last. He clutched the table convulsively for a moment, then his active mind saw its way towards hope. Maurice was evidently very ill; his warped imagination had probably misconstrued

some untoward business transaction into serious crime. He must be disabused of this, and got home to Portland Place at once.

"You over-estimate things, Maurice," he replied, as quietly as he could, albeit he was unable to master a slight tremor in his voice. "You're ill, and conjure up evils that have no existence. Let me talk over things a bit with Laroom. I'm not much——"

"Laroom!" cried Maurice, interrupting him almost in a shriek. "Yes, all the world will talk it over with Laroom! Don't fear but what it will be sufficiently talked over. Club, smoking-rooms, and London drawing-rooms will have plenty to say about it. When a man in society turns robber, and is detected, don't think but what it will be sufficiently talked over."

"My dear Maurice," interposed Dainty, "do be a little calm, and let's think what is best to be done."

"Think!" returned his brother—"I am destined to think—aye, how bitterly!—till my days be run. To think of the ruin and disgrace I have brought upon you all—to think how weak, how shallow, how credulous, how untrustworthy I have proved myself. Think!—good God! Dainty, don't speak to me of thinking! I have thought till I am well-nigh mad."

It began to strike Dainty Ellerton that this was really the case, and that disasters in business had affected his brother's brain.

"But how am I to help you, Maurice?" he said at length, gently.

"You must tell them—you must break it to our mother and Rosie. But get them away first, far from here; they will bear it better then," replied Maurice, in thick, rapid, passionate tones. "I don't know how you are to do it—that must be for you to manage. But you will contrive it somehow, Dainty, won't you?" and he looked eagerly into his brother's face.

"But what is it that I am to tell them?" inquired Dainty, doggedly, intent upon knowing the worst of this business.

"What are you to tell them!" and the words were literally dropped from the speaker's lips. "You'll have

to make them understand that he whom they regarded with so much love," continued Maurice, almost in a whisper, "is vilest of the vile; you'll have to explain to Rosie that her guardian has stolen from her every shilling she has in the world—that she is acreless, portionless, a beggar, through him. You will have to make our mother comprehend that her son is a felon, and about to share the fate of felons."

"Good God!" cried Dainty, his girlish face white with horror, "is this the truth?"

"Yes! I'm asking a good deal, I know, Dainty, but don't turn your back on your blackguard brother for a little," whispered Maurice, with shaking voice. "I'm not going to plead any nonsense about 'sorely tempted.' I've nothing to urge in extenuation to any one. I have sinned, and if my sin could but recoil on my head only, I should be content. But it's the agony—the shame, that you all must share with me that causes me such infinite torture. If ever I've deserved your love, be true to me now. For me you can do nothing, but you can surely soften the blow to our mother and Rosie."

He ceased speaking and looked anxiously at his brother, who never answered him a word, but sat with his face buried in his hands.

Plenty of pluck had Dainty Ellerton physically, but it was the first time that attribute had ever been tried morally. He recognizes that his brother is speaking truth; he is far too much a man of the world not to see the misery that lies before them all. But Dainty would have ever scorned to turn his back upon a friend in trouble. He would have stood loyal to one even in disgrace, explaining it all with the simple—"Well, we were pals once, you know. He hasn't run straight, and I've nothing to say for him; but I can't quite give him up now he's down." He raises his face at last very pale, but very firm.

"I'll stand by you, Maurice," he says, quietly, "through thick and thin. How you came to do what you have done, I'm not going to worry you by inquiring—only this far. Is there no possible chance of averting exposure?"

"None," was the gloomy rejoinder."

"Recollect that whatever Rosie may think of the loss

of her fortune, she can never wish to bring shame upon us," said Dainty.

Maurice winced at the words "upon us"—already had Dainty incorporated himself with his disgrace.

"I know it," he returned, curtly.

"Have you consulted Laroom?"

"Yes—fool that I am," returned Maurice, fiercely, "only too often. I am not defending myself, mind, but had it not been for Laroom and his evil counsels, I had never committed the crime which I am about to suffer for. He is our bitterest enemy. He did make proposals to save me, only the other day. I don't think he's likely to forget my answer to them for a little; he should carry it on his countenance for a few days yet. If you happen to meet him, you may see my refusal of his terms still legibly imprinted on his cheek. The Ellertons have borne the reputation of striking hard in days by-gone, and I put all I knew into the stroke my cane dealt," said Maurice, with a faint smile.

If Laroom and his brother had quarrelled, it was indeed hopeless, thought Dainty. He knew quite enough of Laroom to guess how dangerous he could be, with the knowledge he of course possessed under such circumstances. Dainty, indeed, had formed a far truer estimate of Mr. Laroom's character than his brother. He had nothing tangible to allege against him, but he instinctively mistrusted him, disliked him. He could have given you no reason for so doing. If hard pressed, he would have justified himself in terms enigmatical to the public, though thoroughly understood by the profession to which he belonged. "Not my sort," he would have said. "Gives me the idea of being a bad lot."

"Maurice," he said, after a pause of some duration, "whatever it is that you have done, we are brothers still. From what you say, I am afraid you have been induced to speculate with money that did not belong to you, and Rosie's fortune forms part of it. You wish me to get the mother and her out of town before the smash comes?"

Maurice nodded.

"And besides I'm to break it to them. I'll do my best, old fellow," continued Dainty, with quivering lips; "but

—but, you know it's not quite an easy mission you're sending me on."

"I know it," replied the other. "I have committed the sin, and I am asking you to bear the shame of confession, because I want courage to do it myself. Yes, Dainty," he said, in a low, quiet, resolute voice, "I know all I'm asking of you. I have suffered much these last few days; my nerves are shattered, and I own my heart fails me. Coward!—yes, Dainty, coward all through—coward of the vilest sort—an indolent coward. Had I but had the courage to have faced and looked into my business difficulties to start with, I should probably have found them far from insurmountable. But I shrank from unpleasantness; I listened to the voice of a scoundrel. 'Twas easier to steal than to work. My God!" he cried vehemently, "I'm worse than any kennel-bred outcast, who lives a life of robbery. Hunger, their necessities and their ignorance, all plead for them. But I! what have I to urge?—nothing—birth, training, education, were as nought! the feelings, the affections of those dearest to me, utterly lost sight of. A villain tempts me, and I steal; and yet it didn't appear to be stealing in the first instance," he continued, as his voice fell again. "How thin a line it is that divides us from crime."

Yes! It is the history of most fraud and embezzlement in the commencement, before the mind becomes accustomed to the contemplation of iniquity, that it is but temporarily borrowing other people's money without their knowledge or consent. It will do them no harm—of course it will be replaced in a little while—they will never know. Such is the specious sophistry which the shopman who robs his master's till, the banker who defrauds his clients, and the trustee who breaks his trust, all make use of to themselves. But it never is replaced, and he who has once embarked upon a course of using money not legitimately his own, seldom abandons the practice till the intervention of the law puts a stop to his illegal career.

There had been painful silence between them for some minutes. Maurice sat with his head leaning on his hand, and his face half concealed therein. It was Dainty broke the silence at last.

"How long will it be," he said hesitatingly, "before everything is known?"

"I can't tell," returned the other drearily. "Tomorrow, perhaps—any day, in short, but most assuredly very soon. I wish all were over now!"

"Then, Maurice, the sooner I commence the task you have set me the better," said Dainty. "I shan't like it the better for thinking about it, and there is no time to be lost. Don't think I am flinching from you, if you don't see me for a few days. Recollect I shall be doing your bidding, and you will find me by your side when the worst comes. I am not good at sentiment," continued Dainty, in somewhat quavering tones, "but you *can* depend upon me. I'm your brother, mind, hap what may. Good-bye now—'tis the saddest I ever said to you; and—and, God help you, Maurice, in your trouble!"

A warm wrench of the hand, and Dainty was gone, leaving the miserable man to wrestle with his sin in his solitude as he best might.

And in the dark hours of the night occurred to Maurice Ellerton the thought, whether it were not best, for the sake of all those dear to him, to pile crime upon crime, and die by his own hand. So in some measure might he save them from the shame he was about to bring upon them. But no! warped as his mind was, he thought he saw his way to the making of some atonement.





CHAPTER XII.

WOE IN PORTLAND PLACE.

DAINTY ELLERTON might not be very clever, but he was eminently cool and practical. He had never yet been so moved as by his brother's story; it wounded him in the two most assailable points of his nature. The one great affection of Dainty's life was for his mother, and what crueller blow could be dealt her than this; the one great fact in Dainty's theory of life was never to be guilty of a mean action. Ruin in his eyes meant nothing, providing you were ruined in accordance with the peculiar code held by him and his associates. Spending more money than you had might be foolish, it generally involved much grief and tribulation in the sequel; but in Dainty's view it amounted to no more than this. Not a very legitimate conception, perhaps, of the theory of life, but withal not a very uncommon one. But, in Dainty's vernacular, "to let in any one but a usurer was bad form. They, he held, took good care of themselves, and if the prey at times escape the snares of the hunters, there were enough of well-flayed victims in the nets to make it but matter of congratulation that one had slipped through the meshes. But Maurice's case was dark as anything could be, in Dainty's estimation. He was his brother, had been a good brother to him, and had come to his assistance in his own days of difficulty. Dainty had no idea of flinching or not standing by him to the last, but he held Maurice's crime as unpardonable; neither admitting of apology nor

glossing over. It was rankest breach of honour, and in Dainty's eyes that stood for sin past forgiveness. You might pity the culprit, but he was beyond your sympathy.

It can be scarcely supposed that Dainty numbered many such enthusiastic admirers as Mr. Weaver, but in a more modified way he had a good many. Self-assurance is a great quality to go through the world with, and Dainty possessed that in a high degree. "*Il faut se faire valoir*" ought to be written in our early text-books, and no greater mistake can be made than confounding this quality with impudence, which constantly proceeds from the very lack of it. Then, again, Dainty excelled in many of those accomplishments that men hold in high estimation. True, those somewhat languid *trainante* ways of his were often attributed to superciliousness and conceit, but those who knew him best knew that this was not so.

Dainty, upon leaving Berners Street, directed his steps rapidly towards the Regent's Park. He was terribly grieved, terribly hurt, by his brother's confession, but it was not in Dainty's temperament to be crushed by anything in this world. It was the biggest sorrow he had ever been called upon to face yet, but that it had to be met and grappled with the best way he could, was the sole view he took of it now. He was not an atom blind to the misery that was to come upon them all. Nobody knew better how the taint of his brother's crime would adhere to himself, no one could see more clearly that his mother and cousin would be compelled to bear their share of the shame. Of the world, and mixing in it, all this was plain enough to Dainty. He walked towards the Regent's Park, because he wanted to think it all out. It behoved him to act, and act at once. If he was to carry his mother and cousin abroad, there was no time to be lost; Maurice had said positively the blow might fall any moment now.

Dainty was, as before said, eminently cool and practical. He accepted at once and loyally the task that his brother had meted out to him. It was likely to be a painful business, but he was not blenching from it on that account. If he postponed his visit to Portland Place for an hour or

so, it was only that he might thoroughly settle in his own mind what course to pursue. He foresaw that it would not be easy to induce his mother to quit England without giving due and definite reasons for her doing so; and knowing his mother as Dainty does, he also foresaw that it was quite possible she would consider those imperative cause for remaining in London. It were better, he thinks, if it could be managed, that she should be away while the town is ringing with the news of her son's fall. And yet she must know it ere long, must learn the whole history of Maurice's sin, and what penalty the law may deal out to him for his transgression. Dainty is puzzled. He can't quite make up his mind what is best for him to do in these circumstances.

He has reached the Regent's Park by this time, and strides pretty rapidly along, absorbed in his own reflections. There are plenty of loungers about, enjoying the delicious summer evening, but they are a very different class from those who haunt the walks of the more fashionable West-end pleasure-ground. Mid the throng in Rotten Row. Dainty could have gone few steps without being hailed by an acquaintance, or bowed to from the drive; but up here it's little likely that he will encounter any one he knows. In the last surges of the season, small chance is there of his running across friend or intimate in the purlieus of the Regent's Park. Still he arrives at no solution of his puzzle, and yet that he must determine on some line of action at once is paramount in his mind.

He has walked up to the boundary of the Zoological Gardens, and comes swinging back again in the direction of Portland Place, so absorbed in his own thoughts, and with eyes so little intent upon external objects, that he almost runs against a fashionably-dressed young lady, who, chaperoned only by a small terrier, is strolling leisurely towards him. He raises his hat mechanically to apologise, but the merry laugh that greets him arrests him at once.

"No! no! Dainty," exclaims his cousin. "I'm not going to be all but knocked down to begin with, and then cut. Don't think, sir, I am going to let you behave like a reckless cabman, and fly from the casualty you have occa-

sioned. You'll have to apologise, walk home with me, and explain how you came to be here. I'm as near perfection, I know, as women can be brought to, but even I, my cousin, have my moments of curiosity."

"Good heavens! Rosie, I never saw you," replied Dainty, as he shook hands.

"And I!" exclaimed the young lady, clasping her hands in prettiest attitude of affected despair, "I came out to be seen. Is a bonnet like this to be passed without notice, and wasn't the face under it worth trying to get a peep at? I shall break every glass in the house when I get home. To think that I met with a man who literally didn't think it worth while to attempt to circumvent my parasol! Aldershot is simply brutalizing, that's what it is!"

"It is a very pretty bonnet, and you look very pretty in it," replied Dainty, with a gravity unbefitting his speech, "and if I had not been thinking——"

"Ah, don't do that," interrupted Miss Fielding, "because you're sure to make a mess of it. 'Taking thought' will never add cubits to either your stature or intelligence."

"I don't think you're a judge, Rosie," retorted Dainty.

"No, sir; it's never till you're in sore difficulties that you appeal to a woman's wit. It's not a bad thing to have on your side all the same. We don't reason as you do, but our instinct often hits off what your logical minds totally fail to discover; and now I look at you, Dainty, it strikes me there is something amiss. What is it? Tell me, and see if my brains are any good to you. You're bothered about something, I know."

Instantly it flashed across Dainty Ellerton that he could do no better than make a confidante of his cousin. Who was more concerned in the affair than she? She must know the wrong that had been done her shortly. Why not at once? He knew how quick-witted she was, and what a generous disposition lay beneath her raillery and badinage. True, the injury done to her was grievous, irreparable, indefensible, and to some minds admitting of no forgiveness. None knew better than Dainty the savage enmity that could be implanted in the breast of man or

woman by defrauding them of this world's gear. But then Dainty knew also the great love that knit Rosie to his mother. He knew moreover that both he and Maurice stood dear to her as brothers; he knew that a more unselfish, less mercenary girl than his cousin he had never met, nor one who laid less stress upon her wealth. She would jest about it at times prettily, and affect playfully to give herself airs on the subject, but Dainty knew very well that she did not place the high value upon it that many girls in her position would have done.

All this ran through his mind rapidly, but ere he could come to a definite conclusion, Rosie cut the thread of his meditations.

"Ah!" she said, "you can't quite make up your mind to tell me your troubles. You've come to grief, as you call it, in some shape, I can see. It isn't very bad, Dainty, is it?" she continued, anxiously, and altogether dropping her *riante* manner.

The gloom of his face began to overawe her a little. She had never seen her nonchalant cousin look so serious over an escapade of his yet.

"Turn back, Rosie. We must prolong our walk a little. I have made up my mind to tell you all, and a bitterer story man had never to tell.

She looked up in his face—her own still and grave enough now.

"I am very sorry," she whispered. "If I had known, Dainty, I would not have laughed at you as I did."

"Never mind that. But here is a bench. I think we had best sit down, for my tale will take some little telling."

She obeyed him quietly, with an undefined dread of impending evil hovering around her. Those whose lot it has been to have dread tidings broken to them know well what subtle consciousness of coming calamity instinctively occurs to us on these occasions. However tenderly, however carefully, the subject may be approached, we scent the overhanging catastrophe in the air—we feel that woe is upon us, that we are to be bowed to the earth in tribulation ere the speaker has said his say.

Rosie experienced just this sensation. As she seated

herself she felt intuitively that before she got up again she would have known the saddest sorrow her life had yet seen. She augured only too truly. In brief, concise manner did Dainty explain to her his brother's crime and ruin; that he made away with all that fortune of hers he held in trust; that henceforth she was a beggar, Maurice a felon.

She had dropped her veil to conceal her emotion, but it was evident that she was weeping before his story was finished.

"I can't help it, Dainty," she sobbed, "it's too terrible. It's not my money I'm crying about. It's for you, for him, for mother—for all of us. Can nothing be done?"

"It is hard upon you, Rosie, too."

"Oh! don't think of me," she exclaimed, vehemently. "It isn't that I don't understand what I have lost, that I don't know what it means. I do; and I know I am badly fitted to get on without money. But that is nothing. It is poor Maurice and mother we have to think of."

It never occurred to Rosie, in her loyal, sisterly love for her guilty cousin, to do more than pity him. Women are so slow to recognize the immorality of such offences compared with men; let but their affections be concerned with the offender, and it is hard to make them comprehend the extent of his delinquency.

"You are very good to Maurice," replied Dainty, gravely. "He deserves little pity at your hands. I, his brother,—God help me!—have nothing to say for him!"

"Hush!" she replied. "I won't have you speak like that. He was sore tempted, and he fell. I know how it all happened. He knew I would have lent him all I had to save 'the house,' to spare the mother a moment's uneasiness. Well, I wasn't of age, you see, and he acted as if I had been. Not right, Dainty, of course, but not so bad, when you think of it."

"Rosie, I believe you are the most true-hearted, generous girl I ever met."

"What compliments from you, Dainty!" said Miss

Fielding, with a faint smile. "But what is it you want from me? Can I help you in any way? Maurice is safe—safe from the law, isn't he?" she whispered. "Ruined, but nothing more."

"No, Rose. Maurice, as far as I can understand the whole miserable business, will have, in all probability, to settle with the law. I don't know much about these things, but he will most likely have to undergo imprisonment, if not worse. And to think I can say nothing in his defence! No, those dearest to him will have to be silent when the whole story comes out, and the world is busy throwing dirt upon his name. It will have reason and right too. Anything else I could have faced, but this is hard to bear," said Dainty, sadly.

"It is horrible," murmured Miss Fielding, as the tears ran down her cheeks, and she wrapped her veil closer about her face. "What are we to do? Think. You are quick. Can he not fly before it is too late?"

Frank Ellerton shook his head mutely. It had never occurred to him to tender that advice to his brother. It did not now. Besides, as we know, Maurice Ellerton had already rejected that solution of his difficulties.

"I will tell you what he wants, Rosie," replied Dainty at length—"what he has begged me to undertake and manage for him. He is anxious that you and the mother should go far away from this at once; he says the blow will be easier to meet when it comes, if he can know you two are out of hearing of all the details of his disgrace—where papers cannot reach you daily—where you cannot be pointed at as nearest relatives of the last mercantile criminal. And, Rosie, I think he is right—it will make this heavy trouble more bearable for us all."

"I understand," she said quickly. "You want my help in this. You wish me to aid you in persuading mother to go. It will be difficult. You know she will say that her place is by her son's side in his agony. It would be ever so with either of you. Let us walk, and don't speak to me, please; I want to think."

They rose and walked silently in the direction of Portland Place. Not a word passed between them. Dainty,

half forgetting the storm-clouds that lowered over him, was musing on the courage, magnanimity, and self-devotion that his cousin had shown.

"I knew she had plenty of pluck," he thought, "but I've never done her justice yet. I never dreamt what a great-hearted girl she was before. I wonder whether I ever met another who could have borne her ruin as she has done? Not one syllable of anger or reproach has passed her lips regarding Maurice's shameful conduct; she only sympathises with his trouble. Can she love him, I wonder? I did right to take her into my confidence, at all events. She who is most wronged refuses even to think of her wrongs."

"Dainty," said Miss Fielding, as they reached the park gate, "what are you going to say at home? You can't expect mother to consent to go suddenly abroad without any apparent reason."

"I don't know," he replied. "I must tell her something of the truth."

"You must tell her the whole truth," returned Rosie, "and I pity you with my whole soul for what you have to go through. But," continued the girl, bravely, "it is no time for shrinking. I don't think I have courage myself to tell her; and, moreover, it is your place, not mine. Still, Dainty, I'm not going to desert you. I know the mother well; she will refuse to go away point-blank, firmly and decisively. But when you have once broke the dreadful news to her, I think I have hit upon a scheme that will make her consent. When you have failed, as I feel sure you will, send for me, and tell her to listen attentively to what Rosie has to say. One word more before we go in. When you see Maurice next, tell him—I daresay he would like to hear it, poor fellow—tell him that I forgive him what ill he has wrought me from the bottom of my heart—that he must never think"—and here Miss Fielding's voice shook a little—"that I love him less."

"She does love him," thought Dainty, as he raised the knocker. "I will give him your message, Rosie; it will be a great consolation to him, I make no doubt. It is like your generous self to think of sending it; few would, in your place."

Rosie's cheeks flushed slightly at her cousin's praise, but the door opened, and they passed in without further speech. Mrs. Ellerton looked up from her sofa as they entered the drawing-room.

"What, Frank!" she exclaimed rising—"why, where did you capture him, Rosie?" I thought you were going for a stroll in the Regent's Park, child. Light dragoons don't affect that locality, as a rule."

"Never mind where I found him, mother, it's enough for you that I did, and have brought him here," replied Miss Fielding, with a very forced attempt at gaiety.

The unnatural tones caught Mrs. Ellerton's quick ear at once, and she glanced sharply towards the speaker; but, muttering something about taking off her bonnet, Rosie turned abruptly, and quitted the room.

"What! have you and Rosie been quarrelling?" she inquired. "You always do spar, I know. You shouldn't tease her now, Frank; she's worth better treatment."

The dearest wish of Mrs. Ellerton's heart was that those two should marry; but, like a sensible woman, she never breathed her desire to a soul; holding, with some discernment, that suspicion of such a thing by either of them would go further to induce estrangement than aught else. There are a good many marriages marred annually for want of such reticence. But the mother's keen gaze quickly discovered that there was something much amiss, as she regarded her son's face—that face she had studied so lovingly all these years past. She knew it far too well not to see the sorrow within it, albeit Dainty's countenance was tolerably imperturbable when things went wrong with *him*. But the grief that had now come upon him stung him to the soul, and was utterly beyond concealment.

"What is it Frank?" said Mrs. Ellerton, softly. "I can see you are in trouble, my boy. Come and sit down here beside me. You can trust your mother to sympathize with you, if she can't help; and perhaps she might do that, if she knew what the trouble was."

Dainty seated himself by his mother's side, and took her hand in his.

"I have come to break very sad tidings to you," he said, caressing her hand between his own; "you will need all your courage before I have done."

"Something has happened to Maurice!" cried Mrs. Ellerton, quickly. "Speak! is he much hurt?—what is it?"

"He is not in the least hurt—physically,—though, mentally, in great pain. Mother, we are ruined! Worse, we are disgraced!"

The delicate colour faded from Mrs. Ellerton's cheeks, and an awe-struck expression was visible in the clear blue eyes, as the white, quivering lips faltered forth "Ruined, disgraced!" repeating the words almost mechanically. Dainty drew his mother close to him.

"It is best you should know the whole truth at once," he said, gently, and, without further preamble, he told, as briefly as might be, the story of his brother's shame.

Few words as Dainty spent over his narrative, yet before they were concluded his mother was sobbing convulsively on his shoulder. He tried to soothe her, but she only gasped, in broken voice, "Not yet, Frank dear, not yet!" So he was fain to let her weep on in silence. After ten minutes or so, she raised her tear-blurred face, and the poor trembling mouth essayed to speak. At first she seemed unable to form words—then, in a low, tremulous whisper came, "Where is he, Frank?—I must go to him."

"Listen, mother dearest, to the message he sends you. He implores you to go abroad at once. He says you can do nothing for him here, but it will add to his misery the thought that you are almost a witness of his degradation. He begs you to spare him this. He has adjured me to do his bidding, and see you and Rosie safe across the channel. And believe me, mother, he is right."

"Frank," said Mrs. Ellerton, as she disengaged herself from his embrace, "you and Maurice mean well, but you argue foolishly."

The tears still hung heavy on her eyelashes, her face

was yet very white, but her voice gathered strength as she proceeded.

"You would both fain spare me in this"—she shuddered slightly here—"in this terrible business. But I claim my privilege. It is my right to weep with my children in their affliction, to offer such comfort as a woman who loves them well only can, under the circumstances. Frank," she said, rising, "I know all the love that prompts both you and Maurice to this decision, but I know also that my place is by my boy's side. When all the world lift their voice against him, where should he look for pity and solace on this earth save to the mother who bore him? Whatever his crime, to me he is still the infant I nursed at my breast—the child whose lips first stammered in my ear the holy name of mother."

Her voice was firm enough now, and she uttered the last words with a mingled pathos and dignity that defied reply.

"You need not be jealous, Frank," she continued, in a low, pleading voice. "You know, darling, I would be with you also in your necessity. But it is Maurice now that has need of me, and I must see him to-night."

"Mother," replied Dainty, gently, "I'm afraid you're wrong, but I can't argue with you. Will you please see Rosie, and hear what she has to say?"

"What good can that do? No, let us go, Frank."

"You forget that it is all Rosie's fortune that has been made away with."

"Ah! true. In my anguish for Maurice, I had forgot the wrong that has been done her. Poor Rosie, it is hard upon her, just entering on life, and at his hands, too. My God!" she continued, with a shudder, and burying her face in her hands, as she leant upon the mantelpiece, "it is a sore sorrow to face, Frank. Heaven give me strength to meet it as I ought! I conclude she knows all?"

"Yes. Let me bring her to you. It will be a comfort to you. She has no thought of her own injuries, but is only filled with grief for Maurice's shame." And so saying, Dainty left the room.

A few minutes and the door opened noiselessly. Mrs.

Ellerton, absorbed in her woe, failed to catch the light, swift footstep, as it flew across the thickly-carpeted room, and Rosie's arms were round her, and her soft lips pressed caressingly to her cheek, before she was aware of her presence.

"Mother," she whispered, "I have come to mingle my tears with yours. If you weep for a son, recollect I weep for a brother. If he has wronged us, we can but cry, and forgive him."

The generosity with which she ignored all idea of the special wrong done to herself touched Mrs. Ellerton deeply, and for a few seconds the two wept unrestrainedly in each other's arms.

"But, mother," said Rose, at length, "we must do his bidding, and go abroad. No, not for the reason he has given us," continued the girl, as Mrs. Ellerton shook her head mournfully. "I know what you are about to say, that your place is by his side. But, mother dearest, your place is at *my* side. I must go abroad, and how can I go without you?"

"But why, child, must you go abroad?" inquired Mrs. Ellerton, in astonishment.

"Oh! don't you see? Can't you guess? It is so terrible to have to explain to you!" murmured Rosie, nestling closer into her aunt's embrace.

Mrs. Ellerton shook her head.

The girl's face crimsoned as she put her lips closer to her aunt's ear and whispered:

"They might compel me to give evidence against him, and that would well-nigh kill me; and he—he would suffer bitterly, too."

Mrs. Ellerton started. She had never pictured that to herself; she had not yet realized that Maurice would probably have to appear at the bar of a Court of Justice. She gave a faint low cry, and sank back pale and breathless into Rosie's arms. It was but for a few seconds, and then she recovered herself with a violent effort, and exclaimed excitedly:

"You are right, dear—you might bring destruction upon him. Yes, we must go—go to-night, Rosie. Call Frank, and tell him we shall be ready in less than an

hour. Oh! Maurice, my boy, to think that I must not be with you in your trouble! No, Rose, I'm not going to be foolish. We must pack, girl, quick! I see it all now." And with streaming eyes Mrs. Ellerton hurried from the room.

Miss Fielding slipped downstairs to the dining-room.

"Dainty," she said, "it is all settled. We shall be ready whenever you want us. I suppose you still think it best?"

"Yes," he replied tersely, "I am sure it is."

That night Frank Ellerton, his mother, and Rosie crossed into Normandy.





CHAPTER XIII.

THE COURTS AT WESTMINSTER.



MR. LAROOM is especially jubilant. The day of his revenge draws near—that day which is to blast the name of Ellerton, and to put him, virtually, if not nominally, in possession of Miss Fielding's estates; while she shall sit rocking herself in agony at the loss of her lands, the disgrace and ruin of her friends. So Rolf Laroom pictures her. To Mr. Laroom the loss of goodly acres of arable and pasture-land, or, for the matter of that, any property, would seem to far transcend such petty privation as the loss of friends or relations. Mr. Laroom did not indulge in the luxury of these last, and had been heard at times to congratulate himself on standing so entirely alone. A miserable man, with whom no one wept, with whom no one exulted, standing in selfish, sensual isolation. Not that Mr. Laroom, in his strong, riotous nature, with faculties and animal passions all in their full strength, deemed himself subject of pity. Far from it; he laughed at the weaknesses of his fellows, and derided their craving for sympathy and companionship.

The shutters of Ellerton and Son are up at last. That they have been "on the go" has been no secret in the City for the last fortnight. It has been, indeed, almost surmised that they kept open only to facilitate matters in the Bankruptcy Court—to enable them to lay hands upon such assets as were obtainable, and so exhibit a better schedule before the Commissioner. But they have sus-

pending payment at length, and speculation is now rife as to who are to have the picking of the carcase—who are to be the liquidators?

Mr. Laroom has stepped into bankruptcy in the most perfect and finished way. He still, we must recollect, belongs to the firm, so that it is his interest to see their insolvency proclaimed and conducted on most orthodox principles. He has most unimpeachable books to produce—is prepared to demonstrate the prudence and sagacity of their most disastrous speculations. This is no plunge, no topple over, no being drawn beneath bankruptcy's troubled waters; Ellerton and Co. step delicately, like Naaman, into the stream. They mean but to bathe and be cleansed—to issue immaculate, with no leprosy of fraud clinging to their character—that is, as regards Laroom.

How, then, is Maurice Ellerton to be stricken? Simply through the foreclosing of those mortgages on the Fielding estate; upon which occasion Rolf Laroom intends it to be perfectly transparent that a great treachery has been committed. Such knavery, indeed, as he deems will lead to the attachment of Maurice for breach of trust and embezzlement.

Ellerton and Co. are in the *Gazette*, and amongst those of the London world to whom the Ellertons are known, there is much gossip and speculation upon the causes and consequences of such disaster. "Pooh, bless you! it's a mere nothing," says jolly Sir John Trumbleton; "a sort of influenza getting broke is to these big city swells. They rise like the what d'ye call 'em, from their ashes in a few months, and renew their wonted thingemy-bobs—I mean dinners at the end of a half year's mourning always. I never get such good hook and turtle as I do from men on the verge of insolvency, except from those who've just satisfactorily cleared the Bankruptcy Court. Catch me refusing Ellerton's ticket to feed next season."

"The best of life is but a dinner-party," was the unctuous old baronet's creed, and he knew none other.

"Always thought he'd make a mess of it," draws Horace Sylvester; "not a man of business a bit, you know."

The speaker's own faculty in this respect hardly ex-

tended to ordering a satisfactory banquet at Greenwich, or to the organization of a drag for Epsom.

"What a fool the man must have been not to marry that pretty cousin of his!" exclaims Lady Mandrake. "She had money, I know, and he, well—he'd opportunities, and would be comfortably provided for now. I wonder whether Mrs. Ellerton has a good jointure. If I knew her a little better, I'd call and condole. I should like to know that."

And some few—yes, there were perhaps a few—who had feasted, drank, and made merry in Portland Place, who honestly grieved and were sorry for the misfortune that had befallen the genial hostess and her good-tempered easy-going son. But the world goes on, and in these days, as they have been aptly called (transposing Wordsworth) "of high living and plain thinking," we have apparently no time to grieve much for any one or anything.

"Lisbonne est abymée et l'on danse à Paris."

The bankruptcy is progressing satisfactorily. Mr. Laroom bustles about the city, looking far more like a thriving trader than an insolvent merchant. Foreclosure of the mortgages on the Fielding estate has duly taken place, and that property is now virtually in the hands of Mr. Laroom, although nominally in the hands of his agent, Sirmonds. He knows that Maurice Ellerton is living in Berners Street, that the house in Portland Place is shut up (Mrs. Ellerton's property that, and unseizable by hungry creditors), and that the family have left town. Still Mr. Laroom is not satisfied. Although it was clear to those concerned in the foreclosure of those mortgages, that Maurice Ellerton and his father had made away with their ward's property, yet was there no one to take cognizance of the same. It was whispered about freely in commercial circles that the Ellertons had been guilty of breach of trust; but still, if Miss Fielding declined to move, who was to impeach Maurice on these grounds. This troubles Mr. Laroom much. He had counted on seeing his foe in the felon's dock. There is the fraud undoubtedly, but there is no one to prosecute, Rolf Laroom

rages inwardly at this blot in his game. Maurice Ellerton had equally overlooked this contingency.

Suddenly Mr. Laroom receives a slight check to his hilarity. It comes to him, too, in a most mysterious shape. It is simply a notice of action of ejectment served upon Mr. Simmonds, regarding the Fielding estates, and couched in that young lady's name.

"What can that mean?" mutters Rolf Laroom. "What the devil can it mean?" he asks himself angrily, getting more emphatic in his self-communing the more the puzzle appears insolvable. He goes down to see the solicitors from whose office the notice has been served, but obtains nothing from them but the driest politeness.

He muses a good deal on this. Can there be a weak place anywhere in his schemes? Impossible! Yet every shilling he has of his own—every shilling he has been able to raise, is invested in this affair. He may well feel a little anxious. Pooh! he knows the estate well. He has seen, and indeed had something to say to the drawing up of those deeds. He has seen Mr. Fielding's will, and knows that the Ellertons had power either to sell, or otherwise deal with the estate under it. He can swear there is no flaw there; the property is worth more than has been raised upon it, by perhaps twenty thousand pounds. Can there be a previous mortgage that he knows nothing about? Not likely. So many years as he has been in Ellerton and Son's, he must have known it had there been such. What can be the meaning of this notice of ejectment? Bah! some frivolous conception of Maurice Ellerton's, to avoid exposure and obtain a compromise. Yes, that must be it.

It is the week before the long vacation; all London is hot, jaded, and thirsting for the moors, mountains, or the salt waters. Half the fashionable world have fled. Goodwood is over, and in 'the Park' the few loiterers hail each other with such geniality as travellers meeting in the desert might do. Professional men look harassed and worn, as with limp shirt-collars they bustle about their avocations, trying to get as much work finished up before the holidays as possible. The flag-stones burn through the soles of your boots, and even the moustaches

of the foreign element in Leicester Square hang drooping and disconsolate. The weather has overcome bandoline and cosmetique. About the clubs men smoke cigarettes on the steps, and talk of yachting and Scotland. Down in Westminster the barristers are perspiring in their wigs, the judges sweltering on the bench, and the solicitors threatening to dissolve into mere grease spots. It is hot everywhere; but if there is one place where perhaps it is a little hotter than another, it is in the courts at Westminster.

There is some languid excitement observable around the Law-Courts this August day; might probable have been considerable, but when the thermometer stands close on 80 in the shade, it is hard to get up enthusiasm about anything except iced drinks. It has been rumoured that *Fielding versus Simmonds* is likely to be a very curious case. This report is by no means confined to legal circles. It has reached the club smoking-rooms, and been vaguely discussed there. Still, in what manner, or why, this is to be an interesting trial, has in no way leaked out. Many have been the conjectures on the subject. Many are the *canards* afloat concerning it; but all palpably unfounded, and merely speculative. Still the bar are firmly convinced that it will be a singular and somewhat sensational case.

Two men are pacing up and down Westminster Hall, engaged in deep and earnest conversation. One of these is Laroom; his companion is a sandy-haired, wiry, wizened man, with light cat-like eyes—eyes that cast furtive glances about them; that shrink from encountering direct gaze; that never dwell but for a moment on any one object, but which, nevertheless, in those stealthy glances, take in a great deal of what is passing around them—eyes ever restless, wandering, fathomless, and false; lips thin, passionless, and treacherous. Of an age that it would be scarce possible to guess at, he might have been anything from five-and-thirty to fifty. This is Mr. Simmonds, the defendant in the case about to be heard, and of whose antecedents there is little favourable to be related. It is not requisite to say more of Mr. Simmonds than that he would have sold any friend he ever had for a very limited quantity of silver, and that he is to some extent Laroom's

puppet upon this occasion. A very malevolent puppet to boot—not one to allow the strings to be pulled longer than it shall conduce to his own interests; and capable of turning very spitefully on his employer, at short notice, should their joint performance prove unsuccessful.

"I cannot make out what they are going on," exclaimed Laroom, for somewhere about the twentieth time. "I never knew an attack of the kind so consumedly dark. I can't think of a flaw anywhere—can you?"

"It looks all plain sailing," replied the other slowly; "you know best whether you are playing with cogged dice;" and Mr. Simmonds seemed lost in admiration of his own boots.

"No, I tell you once more," exclaimed Laroom, vehemently, "it is all square enough, as far as we are concerned. If false cards are played, it will be from the other side."

"I suppose they've a case," replied Mr. Simmonds. "You'll remember I've got ten thousand in this, to oblige you, and I shan't feel heavenly if you've made a mess of it. However, Strumley is hard to face in cross-examination; and if they are trying a plant, I fancy he'll break it up pretty soon. It's no use getting anxious, you know," concluded Mr. Simmonds, whose eyes were apparently endeavouring to take note of something behind him.

But now "*Fielding versus Simmonds*" is called, and loungers from all sides hurry into court. Despite the heat of the weather, there is a very full attendance, and in a few minutes places are unattainable. The wigs cluster thick in the barristers' benches, the body of the court is full to overflowing, and the little galleries are filled with fashionably-dressed people, attracted by the rumour of a remarkable case, and that one so lately figuring in West-end circles is somehow mixed up in it.

The leading counsel for the plaintiff opens his case quietly. The present action, he explains, is one for ejectment of a certain John Simmonds, who has unduly obtained possession of an estate, the property of his client, a Miss Rose Fielding, a young lady not yet of age. This estate she inherits from her father, William Fielding, who died ten years ago, and left a somewhat singular

will. He appointed as trustees to his daughter her uncle, Francis Ellerton, since deceased, and her cousin, Maurice Ellerton, both of the well-known firm of Ellerton and Son, whose recent commercial misfortunes are probably still fresh in your memories. Mr. Fielding, in the last year or two of his life, gentlemen, was strongly impressed with the idea that land paid a most undue proportion of the taxation of the country. He went the length, indeed, of declaring that he would sell his estate, and invest the proceeds in divers ways, but that most decidedly he would have no more to do with land, which returned him but very small interest for his capital, and which he deemed so heavily and unfairly burdened, compared with other property. Keeping this fact in view, when, in his last illness he made his will, he had a clause inserted, by which he left to his trustees the power to sell or otherwise deal with the estate. I am afraid, gentlemen, he little foresaw what might be the temptation of such power left to them; but unfortunately the result has been the fraudulent mortgaging of the property."

Quite aware of this is Mr. Laroom. Fraudulent, most decidedly, as regards the trustees, but the mortgage is sound and valid enough, he deems, as far as the deed goes.

"I am not going to dispute that the trustees were undoubtedly left with that power legally, although morally they had no right to use it. But, as I am instructed, gentlemen, it is the defendant who will be the victim of a great fraud. It is the shrewd man of business who is about to suffer, and not the innocent girl, who would appear to have been stripped of her all by those whose bounden duty it was to watch over and protect her. Still, when you give me the verdict, which I have no doubt of receiving at your hands, I shall be open to admit that the defendant has been indeed hardly dealt with. The mortgage deeds, gentlemen, upon which the defendant Simmonds claims possession of the estate, are in effect waste paper. My case lies in a nut-shell. It depends almost entirely upon the evidence of one witness. If you disbelieve his testimony—and I am sorry to say you will find that to be impossible, when you see who it

is that I am about to place in the witness-box—I shall have next to no evidence upon which to ask you to decide in my favour. I am not disputing the right of the trustees to contract such a mortgage, although that is doubtful—I simply question whether they *both* concurred in it. In short, whether *both* those signatures are genuine. Gentlemen, the deed in question is a forgery. I shall prove to you, by irrefutable testimony, that Francis Ellerton never broke his trust by affixing his name to such an instrument. I am about to clear the name of an honourable man who is no more—to preserve to an innocent girl her birthright.”

And here the counsel for the plaintiff resumed his seat, and mopped his brows with his pocket-handkerchief.

“I can’t make it out,” muttered Laroom, feverishly, to his coadjutor.

“It’s about as awkward an opening speech as I ever heard,” replied Mr. Simmonds, drily. “When a counsel so boldly pins his faith on one witness that he’s about to produce, depend on it that one is a clincher. By heavens, I see it all—the deeds are waste-paper. And yet he’d never be such a fool!”

“Good God! what do you mean?” exclaimed Laroom.

“Ah! here he comes,” said Simmonds, as, in answer to his name, Maurice Ellerton stepped into the witness-box. Maurice was very pale, but very firm, as, bowing slightly to the Court, he took his place. He was followed closely by his brother, who remained standing just behind the witness-box.

Maurice having been duly sworn, the counsel for the plaintiff rose, and after some preliminary questions, to the effect that the witness and his father were the sole trustees to Miss Fielding’s property, to which Maurice answered in the affirmative, said:

“And these mortgages were entirely effected by you?”

“Yes.”

“In your father’s life-time?”

“Yes.”

“And with his consent, of course?”

“No.”

“Well, perhaps not exactly with his consent, but, at all

events, with so much consent as his signature to the deeds implies?"

"No."

"Do I understand you, then, to say that his signature not his own in this case?"

"Certainly not."

"That it is a forgery, in fact?"

"Yes."

"Now, Mr. Ellerton, I am going to ask you a very serious question," said the counsel, impressively. "Did you negotiate those mortgages, knowing that your father's signature was a forgery?"

"Yes—no one better," replied Maurice, in low but steady tones.

"It is a lie!" whispered Laroom, fiercely.

"It's one you will have to pay for," said Mr. Simmonds, bitterly, who already foresaw what was coming.

"You are not bound to criminate yourself; but if you knew that signature was a forgery, you doubtless knew who was the forger?" said the examining barrister, interrogatively.

There was a dead silence in the court. Jury, judge, barristers, and the crowd, all craned forward to hear the witness's reply; but Maurice stood pale, silent, and troubled.

"You decline to answer that question?"

"No," he said, at length, raising his head and speaking in firm, resolute tones. "I was the forger!"

"He's committed perjury, by God!" exclaimed Laroom, in a hoarse whisper, that was nevertheless audible for some yards in his own immediate vicinity, and extorted a cry of silence from the ushers.

The counsel for the plaintiff resumed his seat, and Mr. Strumley rose to cross-examine.

"Mr. Ellerton," he asked, "are you aware that the extreme penalty for forgery is penal servitude for life?"

"I have been given to understand so."

"And, in the face of that, you adhere to the statement you have just made?"

"Yes."

"You have no other object in this statement than to repair the wrong you have done Miss Fielding?"

"None."

Even the experienced Strumley was at a loss how to proceed with a witness who vouched for his veracity by the heavy penalty his testimony involved. It was clear to him that this was evidence impossible to shake—impossible to rebut. If the deeds were forged, they were, of course, waste paper, and the forger, marvellous to say, was here for the express purpose of swearing to his own forgeries! Mr. Strumley shook his head and sat down. This was a case to which the oldest lawyer there could not call to mind the parallel.

It was speedily finished, and Rolf Laroom left the Court an utterly ruined man; those estates, for which he had plotted and schemed so long, still decreed the property of the girl who had spurned him. One satisfaction he had; Maurice Ellerton quitted Westminster in custody for forgery, and there was good hope he might see him in the felon's dock now.

A few days later, and Maurice stood there, to listen to a bitter homily from the judge on the enormity of his offence, which terminated in a sentence of "penal servitude for life." Many of the miserable man's acquaintances were there to witness his degradation—Dainty's hand-grip his sole consolation, as the doors of the prison-van closed upon him. For Dainty stood by his brother loyally to the last, and was by his side as that terrible sentence was pronounced.





CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE QUARRIES.



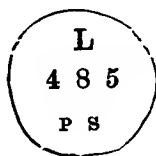
A BRIGHT scorching August sun pours down upon the stone quarries of Portland, well-nigh as fiercely as it did some twelve months back upon the Courts of Westminster. Not a cloud upon the horizon—scarce a ripple upon the deep blue sea. Standing upon the extreme eastern point of the island (if one may be allowed to call it so) the eye glances over a panorama of exquisite beauty. Directly facing you is the slightly troubled line of broken water that marks the “Shambles”—sand-bank fatal in days bygone, before the light was placed there, to many a gallant ship. You can recognise the shoal easily by the deeper colour of the water and the ever continuous ripple, while the surrounding sea is lapped in slumber. To the east lies the mouth of Weymouth’s lovely bay, with Ringstead Point and the Burning Cliff standing out clear and distinct through the bright summer sunshine; while in the far-off horizon one catches the faint coast line of the Isle of Wight. To the West lies the open Channel, with the ever-tumbling, dancing waters of the tumultuous “Race” in the foreground. The faint murmur of the sea kissing the rocks five hundred feet beneath falls upon the ear, mingled with the far-off laughter from the harvest fields that lie between the village of Easton and the cliff.

Gazing over this fair prospect, with vacant stare, is a man in whom that greatest of all earthly blessings—Hope—lies dead. Think what this means! Can anything be

sadder? Can one picture a more awful spectacle than a man in his prime, with the pulse of life beating strong in his veins, and no hope left him in this world—a world, indeed, from which he has virtually departed—a world in which he is never destined again to see all those near and dear to him. No prospect of change or of amelioration in his lot. Nothing but the narrow cell by night—the eternal stone quarry by day—to look forward to for forty years, should he reach the threescore and ten laid down as the average span of our existence here.

A barrow full of broken stones stands behind him as, pausing a moment from his toil, his eyes wander listlessly over the glorious scene before him. Tall and well-built, clean shaven, with hair cut perfectly close, and complexion burnt to a brick-dust tan colour; such is the man's outward appearance. His inner self can but be guessed at from the sad, weary look of the blue eyes that rove so idly across the glittering waters.

He stands there, one of a party of close upon a score, all attired in the grey drabbet coats, fustian knickerbockers, blue, red-hooped stockings, and grey, red-striped night-caps, that constitute the garb of a convict. Men of all ages, of all characters, of diversity of crimes, all burnt to that same brick-dust hue, and bearing at first sight a strange resemblance to each other. Their clothes are stamped promiscuously with broad arrows. Each bears on his arm a medallion. Maurice Ellerton's has this, in black:



The letters signify Life, Penal Servitude; the figures his number. Hideous distinction! Number four hundred and eighty-five shall quarry stone till his life be run, is the interpretation of that terrible badge.

Think what a destiny! to wrestle with the granite rock all your days—at night in the narrow cell and your reflex-

tions. No change—always this—no end to it save in death—no hope, however distant, for you in this world!

But the bronzed, bearded warder who is in charge of the party gives the word to proceed, and these men, raising their barrows, wheel them steadily on to their destination. The broken stone is thrown out, and then they tramp silently back to the quarry whence they came.

A strange sight! Hundreds of brickdust-burnt men, clothed in drabbet grey, with pick and hammer, wrenching the stone from its bed, taciturn by compulsion, speechless by command. No sound but the incessant stroke of the tools, as they meet the rock, the creaking of the barrows, the falling of the splinters, or the occasional stern voice of a warder. Blue-coated, cutlass-belted, these stand scattered through the throng, an apparent handful amongst those they control. But as one studies the scene, one becomes aware of a cordon of sentries, who, with loaded firelocks, hem in that criminal herd. Clad also in blue these, and known as the convict guard.

A grim spectacle to gaze at, these silent labourers, outcasts of humanity of all ranks. Those whom the community has plucked from its bosom, and ostracised for crimes of cupidity, passion, or inextinguishable ferocity. Of all classes, of every grade of depravity, from well-nurtured, well-educated men of Maurice Ellerton's stamp, down to the very sweepings of the kennels; from those who have yielded to temptation in a moment of weakness, to the systematic plunderers of their fellows; from the homicide, whose outburst of hot wrath has been followed by bitter penitence, to the human tiger who would murder for a livelihood always, and at times from the mere lust of killing. For these latter exist, and there is no large public prison but what can furnish its specimens. Not always brutal, uneducated, clownish. Far from it; the most ferocious of this kind are generally possessed of some education, and more than average intelligence; but having once tasted blood, seem to be conscious of no moral obligation regarding the spilling of it—taking the life, indeed, of their fellows with as little compunction as they would that of a rat. Their only counterpart is "the man-killer," that scourge of an Indian

village. Every phase of crime is represented in that quarry—larceny, arson, forgery, felony, burglary, swindling, manslaughter, murder, etc. Exponents of all of them are to be found amongst those grey drabbed-clad labourers.

Maurice Ellerton drops his empty barrow wearily at a place where the rough stone is being squared into huge blocks, by the more skilled workmen; other barrows, full of the *débris* occasioned by their stone-chisels and hammers, stand ready to be wheeled away in their turn. That is his employment at present. He is serving his noviciate—a mere scavenger of the quarry, carrying away the waste stone for road-making purposes. In due course he will be instructed in the more advanced branches of that toil in which his life is destined to be passed. As he pauses for the few minutes the warder grants them before again continuing their labours, he is greeted with a quiet nod from a man busy shaping a rough block with mallet and chisel. A countenance worth looking at that, albeit the prison barber, and the sun, wind, and dust of the quarries have assimilated it much, at first sight, to those around it. A high forehead, with hair perceptibly worn away at the temples, very straight black brows, under which gleam long, deep-set dark eyes, high cheek bones, a large full, sensual mouth, with a heavy jowl and under-jaw—not a pleasant face by any means. In figure a little above the medium height, spare and wiry. He bears upon his arm the same terrible medallion that is blazoned on Maurice's. Like him, he also is condemned to chip stone till his life be finished. This is one of Maurice Ellerton's special acquaintances; for, despite all rules against speech, these men always find opportunity of exchanging some few words with their fellows.

Maurice had shrunk at first from opening his lips to any one, but few can stand such dreadful isolation for long. There is a craving at times to converse implanted in our very nature. It is incumbent on our humanity to use our power of language.

Had the prison authorities been appealed to about No. 510—for so stood Maurice's acquaintance in their books—they would have told you that they had no more unmitigated scoundrel among the whole fifteen hundred

convicts committed to their charge. His crime had been a robbery characterized by circumstances of brutal and unexampled violence, and it was the merest accident that he had not been arraigned for murder, instead of on the charge for which he had been sentenced to penal servitude for life. They would further have stated it as their belief that he had led a career of bloodshed and plunder in Australia to which it would be hard to find a parallel, and that he was perfectly capable of recommencing it, should he ever find himself at liberty. More than once had he displayed the innate ferocity of his nature since he had been in Portland. Untameable, irreclaimable, and with a fierce thirst for blood, whenever the slumbering devil within him was roused, this man was a human tiger—a tiger now happily caged, but even held in awe by his brethren in captivity. Most of these shrank from friendship with savage James Carnoul.

And yet, with all this, he was by no means an uneducated man; could talk well and with a quiet manner, till something occurred to arouse his ferocious temper. Then blasphemy, execration, and ribaldry, poured like a torrent from between his lips; and if he failed to avenge his fancied wrongs by brutal personal attack upon the offender, it was simply because an opportunity was not vouchsafed him. He would brag fiercely of the men he had slain beyond the seas at these times—of the gaols he had broken, and threaten the lives of all those that had to do with him. Warders kept a watchful eye on him, and were wont to loose their cutlasses in their sheath when they had special charge of Carnoul.

Maurice Ellerton as yet knew nothing of this man's history; the bond between them was simply that they had talked together—a bond that nevertheless constitutes more within the walls of a prison than it does outside by many degrees. One other associate has Maurice, but he is not in the quarries. Mr. William Blades is employed in the blacksmith's shop, being a cunning craftsman in the science of forging and welding. Indeed, his dexterity in picking locks and the manufacturing of skeleton keys has been his ruin. Hero he of a celebrated city burglary, yet to be remembered of the public, should the public think fit to

exercise that faculty ; an enthusiast in his profession, who demands no more than to be left alone for twenty-four hours with any safe in London—Hobbs's Patent Safety, or other. "Never saw the strong box yet I couldn't get into if I'd time," says Mr. Blades. "It's a mere question of time. Nor the strong box I couldn't get out of either !" And then Mr. Blades winks pleasantly, as much as to insinuate that his continued residence at Portland is a simple matter of choice and convenience.

Not quite all braggadocio, this upon the part of Mr. Bill Blades ; but that worthy knows perfectly well that getting out of Portland prison is one thing, but getting off Portland Rock afterwards is another. Mr. Blades would inform you, in confidence, that he could very soon be outside the prison if that was any good to him, but that his private impression is that he should be back there again within four and twenty hours, only to be punished for such misdemeanour. That Maurice had made acquaintance with this man was only natural. Their cells adjoined, which, of course, gave many an opportunity of exchanging a word or two. Then, to one utterly prostrated as Maurice was, there was great attraction in the irrepressible vivacity of Bill Blades' disposition. Nothing seemed to daunt that jovial burglar. His vanity was extreme. "Lagged for ten years I am," he once whispered to Maurice ; "but, damme, it was the job of the year, and I ought to be introduced to visitors when they come round—that's what hurts my feelings. I'm a great public character, and these swells here have entered into a combination to crush my reputation."

Still pours down the fierce August sun, which the grey Portland stone reflects back with intensity. Not a breath of air comes across the hot dust-burdened quarry, while the children of crime continue their task with the perspiration streaming down their brick-dust-hued cheeks. The very warders mop their brows and fumble at their collars, to loosen the stiff military stock which their uniform entails upon them. Suddenly the prison clock strikes the half after eleven, and almost simultaneously clangs out the recall bell, the signal for all working parties to withdraw. The men fall in by squads, and

march off, each in charge of its particular warder. The convict guard gathers in its chain of sentries, forms up in mass, and brings up the rear. The several squads, upon gaining the parade ground within the prison gates (for be it clearly understood that the quarries lie outside the prison walls, and are perfectly free for the public to pass through), draw up in double ranks to be searched.

A great feature this searching in the discipline of our government prisons. The authorities are incessantly searching, and yet, with all their vigilance, it is perfectly surprising what the prisoners will continue to smuggle in and conceal in their cells, though these latter are constantly overhauled while their occupants are at work. The prisoners lift off their caps, to show there is nothing in them; then stand with uplifted arms, as the warders, with practised hands, run over their dress from knee to arm-pit. This ceremony over, they are marched off to their respective halls.

The universities of crime assimilate to the universities of learning, in so much that they also are divided into colleges, or, as they are here termed, halls. (Is there not a St. Catherine's Hall at Oxford?) These halls are built in the form of a parallelogram. Spacious double entrance doors at either end open upon a broad corridor, from the centre of which springs a light iron staircase, running up for three stories, and breaking off into airy iron galleries on each landing. Along the sides of the hall run the three tiers of cells—Lilliputian apartments, about seven feet by four, and some seven or eight in height. These constitute the homes of the unfortunates. Such light as they receive comes from the corridor, through the window in the door, or from the lamp let into the panel beside the door. That lamp is only to be opened from the corridor, and consequently not to be interfered with by an inmate of any cell, except by breaking the glass.

Maurice Ellerton's abode is on the ground-floor, at the extreme northerly end of B Hall. The last cell of all is tenanted by that genial burglar, Mr. William Blades, but Maurice's comes next. Once again the lock is turned upon him, and he has recourse to the sole employment of

his lonely hours—the eating his heart out. Time was when all this was new to him, when the petty privations and indignities stung sharper than they do now, when his stomach recoiled from the unaccustomed food, and the daily toil seemed a strain greater than his untutored muscles could endure; then Maurice thought he should soon succumb to the punishment laid upon him. He knows better now. He is fain to confess that he never was in better health. As for the rough, homely fare that he was at first unable to swallow, his sole complaint now is that he does not get enough of it. Yet he is leading a horrible life—to an educated man a terrible life, a mere mechanical existence. All mental life is dead in him. It is apt to die down when hope lies slain, and nothing but an impenetrable blackness represents the future. Alive, but buried! Of this world, yet with the pall thrown over him!

Maurice Ellerton sits upon his pallet-bed, musing upon the past, and peering, with dull, despairing gaze, into the years that lie before him. It is not that he disputes the righteousness of the doom meted out to him, although the sentence was harder than he had anticipated. He acknowledges his sin frankly, complains not at the punishment that it has entailed upon him. But to be without hope, that is hard; to think that he is never again to see other room than that cribbed, confined cell, of seven feet by four, in which he sits; to know no other glimpse of the outside world than those grey, dusty quarries; never again to see a tree, the grass, the corn-fields, the purling brook, to hear the sweet birds singing, the cawing of the rooks, or gaze upon the autumn's golden grain; Prometheus-like, bound to the rock, with the vulture of despair battenning upon his heart-strings! Such the future that lies before him.



CHAPTER XV.

PORTLAND ON SUNDAY.

IT is Sunday at Portland. Far and wide, in pleasant country villages throughout England, the sweet bells are ringing—"music's laughter," as Hood calls them. In the big cities the air resounds with the soft sonorous chime. Gaily-dressed crowds flock to their different temples, to pay thankful reverence to their Maker, to bring away holier and better aspirations for the morrow, it may be hoped. Even the solitary bell of Portland's prison seems mellowed as it summons its inmates to church this gorgeous summer morning. All aglow with colour are the public gardens fronting that edifice. Saucily froths and tumbles the Race, reminding one of a merciless coquette, whose relentless cruelty is not to be guessed at, except by those who have found themselves within the nets. Innocent and pretty enough looks that broken, dancing water, this bright September morning, and yet not a Portlander but could tell wild legends of the pitiless Race. Woe betide the ship that should be entangled in the Race in its wrath, when it seethes and bubbles like a cauldron of Hecate's own brewing!

But "the Halls" are emptied, and their grey-jacketed inhabitants march silently and orderly in their respective squads to church. A very curious sight to look upon this. Picture to yourself upwards of a thousand of these brick-dust-countenanced outcasts, ranged right and left of a

cruciform building; on raised seats at every ten paces, a blue-coated warder, with belted cutlass. Five hundred or more prisoners to the right of you, five hundred or more to the left of you. The pulpit and priest in front. The convict guard, with loaded firelocks, behind.

Quietly and solemnly is the service conducted, as in any other place of worship. How far it touches those untamed natures, it were bootless to conjecture. They are much like any other congregation the writer has ever seen. Some listen attentively, some reverently, some with dull apathy, and others with evident weariness. But the blessing is at last spoken, and that congregation troops off, to enjoy the greatest boon that prison discipline accords them. On Sundays they are allowed to walk round the prison yards together, and indulge in unlimited conversation. No restriction is placed upon how they pair off; for an hour they may mix as they list—are free to consort with each other as it pleases them.

These unfortunates are classified into three grades, such classification denoted always by that dread medallion stitched upon the sleeve of their jacket. It not only denotes the number they are known by, the punishment they are condemned to, but the colour of it determines the class to which they belong. They all commence in the third, symbolized by the black medallion, such as is worn by Maurice Ellerton and Carnoul. Good conduct for a certain period transmutes this into a yellow one, and certain privileges accrue to that grade. Further time and good conduct changes this badge to blue, with yet further privileges attached to it. For instance, to the third-class is accorded but one hour of this liberty of converse; to the second, two; to the first, three. This privilege is allowed only on the Sunday, and limited to one hour at a time. Maurice Ellerton still wears the black medallion, because time has not yet allowed of promotion to the second class; James Carnoul, because a human tiger is not likely to find favour or mitigation of his sentence—because the prison cat has been busy with his back—because the dark cells and himself are familiar with each other—because nothing but timely intervention saved his adding yet one more murder to the catalogue of his crimes.

There is a night watchman now, though a warder once, who limps as he goes his rounds yet from the ferocious assaults of that wild beast clothed in likeness of humanity. Pity for his own and mankind's sake that the gallows had not closed his career some time past. It may seem shocking to say, but there do appear at times in the annals of crime men irreclaimable, irredeemable, untameable, who, both for their own sake and that of society, were best done away with. James Carnoul was one of these.

Maurice Ellerton is as yet strange to Portland and its ways. It is but some few weeks that he has been an inmate there. He had been sent, in the first instance, as is customary, to Millbank, where much solitude and reflection had plunged him into that dull apathy of despair which still possessed him. He leads a purely mechanical life at present; shudders when he thinks of the past—shudders still more when he thinks of the future. Life to him seems but a dreary road, illumined by no ray of sunlight—an abyss of blackness, which no gleam of love or hope can ever brighten. He has nothing left to look forward to but the end—the cynic exultation that, when his soul escapes its prison, then also shall his body break lock and ward; and yet he thinks sadly what weary years must be lived down ere he, in the very prime of his manhood, can hope for that.

He paces mechanically and dejectedly round the yard this Sunday morning, sole one of all that chattering throng who walks in silence and alone. He shrinks from the coarse companionship of his fellows; he is at no pains to make acquaintances. Of the two that he has some slight knowledge of, Carnoul is in trouble, and consequently debarred from this indulgence, while the vivacious Mr. Blades is gossiping with some one else.

But suddenly Bill Blades is struck by the woe-begone air of his neighbour in B Hall. Though a most irreclaimable scoundrel, Mr. Blades is a man of very kindly feeling, and he felt a sort of pity, to use his own vernacular, for “a swell so down on his luck.” He crosses to Maurice, and exclaims:

“Well, mate, you don't look like having a deal to say, even if you'd some one to say it to; but it's a relief to

have a chap gabble something in your ear when you've got the dismals, ain't it? Bless you, I know it. I was struck all of a heap like, the fust time I was quodded, but it ain't nothing when you're used to it. It's a healthy life, and you've no anxieties about the future. Say! put your hand again mine when we come to the far end, and I'll give you a 'chaw.'"

"You're very kind!" replied Maurice, "but I can't manage tobacco in that form."

"Then the sooner you qualifies the better," retorted Blades. "You see a smoke ain't to be brought off, anyhow. If you don't chew what are you to do?"

"But how do you manage to get tobacco?"

"Well, you ain't fly to much, that's certain. Howsomever, in course you ain't. Why, if you can pay for it, and are clever at smuggling things in, you may contrive to have a good many little comforts. It ain't often I'm without tobacco, I tell you."

"But how do you get these things?" inquired Maurice.

"Well, you see, there's a good many things besides stone to be found in the quarries, for those who knows where to look for 'em. There's plenty of people outside who know how to hide what we wants if they're only paid for it. The officers and warders know it goes on just as well as we do. They does their best to stop it. It's just smuggling all over. Sometimes they seizes a lot, and sometimes we run it all right."

"But how do you get money? Can you get letters?"

"Well, my pals find the money. The people outside who make a business of it charge high, but they deal on the square—yes, they're tolerably fair," said Mr. Blades, meditatively; "they make you pay about four shillings for a shilling's worth of bacca, but they run a good bit of risk. Bless your innocence! there are plenty of post-offices in the quarries that I knows of. Getting a chance to visit 'em's sometimes difficult, and smuggling in what you find there somewhat harder still; but there is excitement in it too. I never enjoyed a quid outside so much as I does one here."

"I should like to send away a letter," remarked Maurice, musingly.

"D'ye mean it, mate?" asked his companion.

"Yes, very seriously."

"'Spose you never thought about how you were to write it?" observed Mr. Blades, grinning.

"My God, no! I forgot that I had neither pens, paper, nor ink."

"Ah!" replied the burglar, with a glance of compassion, "it struck me you'd want a bit of learning before you begin to correspond with the Home Secretary about the injustice he's been a-doing you. Shall I teach you?"

Maurice nodded assent.

"Well, to begin with, blacking and water don't make bad ink, and I could very soon find a bit of steel or something I'd make a pen out of. But as you ain't handy, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll just get a sheet of note-paper or two, a pen and some ink on my own account, and hand 'em over to you. I reckon you've friends with money, haven't you?"

"Yes. Not a great deal, perhaps, but——"

"Who could come down with a tenner when necessary," interrupted Mr. Blades. "That's the ticket! I'll put you in communication with 'em by Portland special post. We don't want the Governor running his eye over our love-letters—do we?" continued that worthy, with a wink; "and when we write to inform the Home Secretary that the Governor ain't fit for his position, it isn't likely we should think him just the feller to forward our complaints. I say, wot was you lagged for?"

Maurice's face flushed slightly as he replied, quietly:

"Forgery."

"Ah!" said the loquacious Mr. Blades, "that's wot I calls educated burglary. When you've edication you go in for forgery, and lays hold of the mopusses that way; when you ain't, why, you sticks to the legitimate, as I do. There wasn't a better man in the profession that I was—and they knew it," exclaimed Mr. Blades, enthusiastically—the man's vanity completely overmastering him. "Why, there wasn't standing room in the Court during my trial, and those—what-d'ye-call em?—sun-likeness chaps was a-shooting me all day. The picture-papers, too, sent

specials to draw me—and ‘the dailies’ fellers to talk to me about how I did it.”

“I recollect your trial,” said Maurice. “You broke open a safe deemed impregnable.”

The burglar indulged in a low laugh as he replied :

“Yes, and, wot’s more, Bill Blades never yet saw the bolt, lock, or bar that could beat him, if he’d a mind to go through ‘em.”

“Why do you stop here, then?” exclaimed Maurice, suddenly.

Mr. Blades’s face fell.

“I’ll tell you,” he replied, speaking slowly. “I could break out of this prison easy enough, if I set to work to think about it, but I couldn’t get clear of the island. That’s where it is! I have no mind to break out only to be brought back again within twenty-four hours, to undergo dark cells, or ‘the separates’ on bread-and-water. But, hush! time’s up; here come the warders to march us back. I’ll not forget the note-paper and pen.” And, with a nod to Maurice, Mr. Blades fell into his squad, and was duly walked away to his “private apartment.”

When Maurice found himself once more locked up, he sat down upon his bed and began to think. For the first time since his sentence, interest was aroused in him. It was very rarely by the prison regulations that he was allowed to write or receive letters. True, he could count upon such from his mother, brother, Rosie with certainty, when they were permitted; but, of course, these were read in the first instance by the officials, as were also his replies. As regards Dainty and his cousin, the knowledge of this paralysed their pens. They could not bring themselves to write otherwise than guardedly when they knew that what ~~they~~ wrote was to be first perused by the eye of a stranger. It was only the all-powerful love of a mother that could rise superior to this. She alone dared to pour out all that was in her sore-stricken heart, reckless of who saw it, so that it greeted her son’s eyes at last. Careless of comment or remark, so that she succeeded in mitigating his weary lot, in some respect.

Still it is easy to enter into the feeling which swayed

Dainty and her cousin. Most of us would write with leaden pens if we thought that our careless words were to undergo scrutiny before they reached their destination. Such supervision is of course a necessity to a prison ; but it strikes hard upon those who still weep and sorrow for the captive ; who, though they have nought to urge in extenuation of his crime, yet cannot help shedding bitter tears over his marred, lost, broken life ;—who yet love him, and cling to him though society has cast him out. And even the greatest criminals have, as a rule, some one who is bowed to the dust with grief,—I won't say for their wrong-doing, but for the consequences it has entailed on them. When there is none left to drop a tear for you in such a strait, be your crime what it may, pray God that the grave may close over you quickly. Unloved, unwept, why linger here ? Better the quiet oblivion of the tomb, with a meek trust in the all-merciful goodness of the Creator.

Maurice, ruminating on his quaint companion's words, begins to think that he sees a way of communicating with those dear to him constantly—of writing and receiving letters that shall undergo no supervision of the authorities. He wants nothing more—only letters. For the earthy joys of Mr. Blades, such as tobacco, and occasional small bottles of spirits, he has no craving. But to hear often from those he loves will brighten his life wonderfully. The doubt and uncertainty, too, about that smuggled correspondence will once more give zest to his existence. He will have something to live for.

It is surprising upon what a minimum of hope men will feed, to what straws they will cling, at what shadows they will clutch. As the song says ;

“ Hope directs the fancy, saving mortals from despair ;
And we all forget our sorrows, building castles in the air.”

But it is when hope lies slain within us that we taste the bitterness of death. It is seldom, perhaps, that such awful doom descends on man in this world. In his direst necessity, in the cruellest lot ever meted out to him, there is ever, in the far distance, in the dim horizon of the future, a faint ray of heaven-born hope. A mere glimmer it may

be, but to how many miserable lives, to how many pinched homes, to how many stricken hearts, to how many struggling human beings, does that far away gleam constitute the whole poetry of existence, the one thing that makes this sordid every-day life endurable? Sole gift of the gods not lost to mankind through Pandora's fatal curiosity.

And for some months Maurice Ellerton had been without hope. It is but a small blessing that he had even now to look forward to, but it will be something to scheme, to work for. Letters! Yes, letters that shall be unread of the prison authorities, that is his aim and ambition now. He is possessed already with a feverish impatience to commence operations. That alone shows what a neophyte he is in the contravention of prison discipline. Mr. Blades could have taught him better. He would have told him that such indirect breach of the prison rules was only to be accomplished by much patience, cunning, and wariness; that communication with the outside world necessitated watching for days for an opportunity; that it entailed equal perseverance, adroitness, and assiduity to obtain a reply.

Maurice has conjured up a very different picture, and imagines himself carrying on a considerable correspondence almost immediately. It is the first ray of light that has crossed his brain since Dainty's fierce hand-grip assured him that he was not all abandoned of his kin when that terrible sentence, "Penal Servitude for Life," smote upon his ear. He sees again the crowd of curious faces that were bent upon him as he left the dock—many, too, that were well known to him, and had smiled genial greeting to his salute but a few weeks before. He had cursed humanity in his heart as the prison-van bore him away, and he thought over how those with whom he had dined and jested had come to look upon him in his agony, to gaze upon him at the stake. To count upon little sympathy from acquaintance, to discover, when the measure of friendship shall be tested, what a small residue remains to you, was a lesson Maurice Ellerton had then to learn.

It may be urged that a criminal is unentitled to such sympathy; and yet, if there is tinge enough of romance

about his crime, how often he receives it. Still those who have known a man well might be expected to feel some regret for his fall, his degradation, albeit there is no palliation of his offending visible to their eyes.

Had Rolf Laroom's view of the case been known to the public, then the man that was supposed to have committed perjury to save from the effects of his forgeries the estate of the woman he loved, would have been assured of their sympathy. There was romance about that idea, and he would have been much pitied, perhaps even glorified. The second crime would have obliterated the first. It would have been said this man sacrificed himself to save a woman from the results of his iniquity. That he had simply committed two crimes instead of one, that he had elected to defraud his creditors instead of his cousin, would not have been noted, nor entered into by the world generally.

But Mr. Laroom's suspicions, and the grounds for them, were known only to himself, and one or two of his coadjutors. Even his fierce exclamation in the court had made no permanent impression, although it had occasioned some sensation at the time. Whether he was right or not in his conjecture time may show.





CHAPTER XVI.

THE SOWING OF THE SEED.

SLOWLY pacing the pier at Dieppe, and glancing occasionally over the bright, sunny waters, at the smoke of a still distant steamer, are two ladies; the elder attired in deep mourning, and wrapped in her own reveries, with face pale and sad, seems to pay but little heed to the prattle of her young companion. This latter, too, is marvellously sobered in manner since we last saw her a year ago. The terrible blow that has fallen upon the house of Ellerton has wrought a great change in Rose Fielding. The capricious little fairy we once knew has been transmuted into a loving, watchful woman, by the sorrow that has come upon them. Her devotion to Mrs. Ellerton is immeasurable. She hovers over her with untiring assiduity, ever ready to weep with her, or to talk softly over the bright bygone days that are fled; to throw what comfort she may on the future; to picture forth such relief as she can conjure up to their present grief and desolation; to whisper, with fond caresses, that mitigation of such sentences always comes with time—that the mother will yet clasp her boy in her arms again. Who so clever as Rosie at pleading extenuating circumstances for her cousin's crime? Who so satisfied with the results of her special pleading as she, when winning a faint smile from that woe-worn face.

Dieppe, gossiping, inquisitive, like any other small watering-place, is perfectly aware of the history of that

elderly lady in deep mourning, and the pretty fair-haired girl who is always by her side. Dieppe, somewhat sore from sharp encounters with adventurers and *mauvais sujets*, with bitter recollections of distinguished English people who had left it abruptly, and with strange oblivion of various outstanding accounts, had turned up its virtuous nose in the first instance, and eyed with cold disdain these relations of one "who is expiating his crimes at the galleys," as they phrased it. But the quiet unobtrusive life the two women led, and especially the promptitude with which their modest bills were always settled, had induced Dieppe lately to regard them rather with sympathy. It is true Dieppe society, that little mixed cosmopolitan hot-bed of scandal, had, after much gossip and shaking of its head, decided that the line must be drawn somewhere, and that "really it was quite impossible, you know. They were very sorry for Mrs. Ellerton; believed her to be a woman much to be pitied; but you can't call upon a convict's mother, you know." And then Dieppe society shook its head once more, and waited to hear what you had to say to that. Rosie and her aunt were happily ignorant of the fierce discussion that had gone on about them. Desiring to live in complete retirement, it had never entered their heads that Dieppe society had agitated its august mind as to whether they might be received into its bosom. Perhaps things had turned out for the best, for Dieppe would have probably resented the refusal of the hand of fellowship, had it been proffered, while most assuredly it would have been rejected if extended.

It was little likely that Mrs. Ellerton and Rosie, bowed down by their sorrow, should covet the making of mere watering-place acquaintances. The mother seemed all insensible of the disgrace that attaches itself, however unjustly, to the near relations of a great criminal. She thought only of her son, of his misery, of his punishment. How the world might regard her, was a petty consideration, that had as yet scarce crossed her mind. With Rosie it was different; she was keenly sensitive on this point. Not that for one moment she ever blenched at such ordeal. But she was painfully alive to the curious stare, the half-whispered commentary, that so constantly attended their

appearance in public. To all this Mrs Ellerton was utterly blind. She put on mourning as soon as she heard the result of Maurice's trial: she made little parade of her feelings, but Rosie knew well that till her death she would never wear other than such sombre raiment, unless, by some unforeseen agency, Maurice should be restored to her; and at the bottom of Mrs. Ellerton's heart there still lurked a hope, almost amounting to a belief, in this apparent improbability. She could have given no reason—would, indeed, have shrunk from admitting such weakness—to any one; but Rosie knew it, as she did most other things connected with her adored "mother."

But the steamer nears the entrance of the harbour, and Rosie strains her eyes to see if she can recognise any one among the passengers.

"Yes, mother!" she exclaims at length, as she drops her opera-glasses. "He is there, I am sure—I saw him. Let us walk back to the landing-stage. The packet will be there almost as soon as we now."

Slowly the steamer works her way up the harbour; with vociferous shrieks lets off her steam, and amid much turmoil, screaming, and execration, is warped along the quay-side. Dainty, just indicating his portmanteau and travelling bag to a commissionaire, steps lightly on shore. Already his quick eye has discerned his mother and cousin on the outskirts of the crowd. Another moment he has clasped the former in his arms, and shaken hands with the latter.

Miss Fielding is not altogether satisfied with this salutation. She reflects that Dainty used to kiss her on such occasions, and wonders a little why he has omitted that ceremony now. She is always rather jealous and critical of his attentions to herself, although she is scarcely aware of it, and would have probably indignantly denied that it was so, had any one ventured to make such comment in her hearing.

"It is a great comfort to see you again, Frank," said Mrs. Ellerton, with a faint smile, as she slipped her hand within her son's arm, and they walked away in the direction of the market-place.

"Good of you to say so, mother," replied Dainty. "I

hope you've got some dinner for me, for your boy is in a state of fierce carnivorous hunger, and his uppermost thought at present is for the flesh-pots."

"Yes, we counted on your being at dinner with us to-night. Rosie was quite confident about it. But I, Frank, can never be sanguine again."

"Hush!" replied Dainty, as he pressed her arm. "It's been a sore sorrow to get through, and it's not to be supposed we can any of us forget it. Still, mother, you have learnt to bear it bravely now—is it not so?" and Frank Ellerton peered inquisitively into his mother's face.

She smiled fondly up at him as she replied:

"I've dried my tears, dear, but I don't think I can say much more. My burden I must carry to my grave. My sole hope is to see him once more," and her eyes sought her son's wistfully, but Dainty only gazed sadly back into her face. "They used to laugh at me," she continued, with a nervous twitching of her poor pale lips, "and say that I loved you best, Frank; but, you see, Maurice needs my love most now. I am sometimes sorry that I didn't insist upon seeing him before he left London; but I suppose that he and you were right in your decision, and we were bound to think a little of Rosie. It would have been very terrible for her to have been dragged before a court of law."

"I did what he most wished, mother," replied Dainty, in a low voice, "and it was consolation to him in his misery to think that you were spared in some measure all the gossip his crime called forth. I think myself he judged rightly in the matter."

"Ah, well!" she replied mournfully, "it is sad grief to a mother when woe comes upon her children. It is bitter agony when she finds herself debarred from whispering her own love and sympathy into their ears. It has been hard—it is still hard—to bear. I know, Frank, dear, you have done the best you could for all of us, but, my boy, I must sorrow for Maurice till my death."

Dainty said nothing, but pressed the little hand that rested on his arm, and turned his head away. The sight of his mother's patient, woe-worn face was wont to bring a choking sensation into his throat, that necessitated some effort to master.

"We must wait a little for Rosie," he said at length, for Miss Fielding had loitered some little distance behind them, not wishing to intrude upon the first interview between mother and son; but she was not many paces in the rear, and upon seeing that she was waited for, speedily joined them.

It was a quiet, but not altogether unhappy dinner that the trio went through that evening. Sobered in great measure though Rosie was, still the elasticity of her years could not be altogether repressed, and a gleam of the old fun still flashed out occasionally. Nor was Mrs. Ellerton the least the kind of woman to frown upon such sallies. If she herself was still unable to put away that great sorrow that had befallen her, yet she could rejoice to see that her children had to some extent got over it. True, as she contemplated Dainty's face in the mellow lamplight, she could but recognise a certain set hardness that had been altogether wanting there little more than a twelvemonth back. For Dainty, too, is changed. That *insouciant* hussar, who had floated so carelessly down life's summer stream, has become silent, reserved, and somewhat defiant of the world of late. He mixes but little in society now, and is keenly sensitive to any appearance of slight that may be put upon him. He who a short time back, in his self-contained, indolent way, never dreamt but that his presence must be acceptable anywhere, now regards his reception jealously.

Society is tolerably callous and hard of heart, it must be allowed. Still it seldom goes the length of tabooing an acknowledged favourite for the sins of his relatives—not quite so merciful perhaps with regard to the other sex—but to a man it is usually lenient. Still to a man in Dainty's present mood, it is not easy to be civil and hospitable. When a man is anticipating slight or affront, he rarely fails to discover them. It is impossible he should not do so; he takes umbrage at shadows; twists the most common-place observation into a remark to his own disparagement. There is no dealing with such warped, jealous natures. Like the thief who sees an officer in every bush, so they discover jibe or sneer in every sentence addressed to them. Dainty of late has taken much offence

upon positively no foundation. He feels his brother's disgrace so sorely, that he picks quarrels with society upon quite imaginary grounds; rejects invitations sent to him from pure kindness, and dictated by a chivalrous disposition to show that the senders have no wish of confounding him with Maurice's wrong-doing, because, as he says bitterly, "they want to show off the forger's brother at their tables."

Naturally society somewhat falls off from a man who responds to its advances in this wise. Dainty even, to some extent, shirks the companionship of his brother officers, albeit they have sympathised most sincerely with him in his trouble. A very fair test of a man's worth in general is the light in which his regiment regard his coming to grief. The —th Hussars were unfeignedly sorry for Dainty, from the trumpeter of his troop to the colonel commanding.

"And how long are you going to honour us with your company?" inquired Rosie as, dinner finished, they sit over their coffee at the open window, listening to the drums and bugles of the regiment at the castle.

"Only for four days," replied Dainty. "I have but a week's leave, and there's the coming and going. It is hard to get away for longer at this time of the year; and you, Rosie, how do you get on here?—it must be dull for you."

"No," she replied. "I have learnt to do without society now. At first, of course, one was too grieved to think of it, and now I have got quite used to living with my music and my pencil. You are very good, Dainty; you take care we shall never want for new books or new music."

An hour of such desultory conversation, and then Frank Ellerton announces his intention of smoking his cigar on the pier.

"Delightful!" exclaims Rosie. "You'll take me with you, of course. You won't mind being left alone, mother, for an hour?"

"Not at all, but I shall say good-night, as I shall very likely be gone to bed before you come in again."

Another quarter of an hour saw Rosie and her cousin pacing the pier, and engaged in earnest conversation.

"Yes, she looks frail," replied the girl, "and the blow at first told upon her fearfully. She'll never get over it, Dainty—never be the bright, bonnie mother she was again. It weighs upon her mind much that she did not see Maurice, at all events once before she left town. Do you know the dearest hope of her life now?"

"That he may be pardoned?" said her cousin, gently. "But there's little chance of it."

"No; she'd be content with less than that. If she might but see him again, she'd be satisfied." And Rosie lifted her blue eyes somewhat inquisitively to her companion's face.

"I'm afraid the authorities wouldn't allow that; besides, it would be a very sad meeting for her, even if it were possible. She would be inexpressibly shocked to see Maurice in his prison garb, and otherwise much changed. Listen, Rosie; I know all that part of the world well, and once went over Portland Prison. I thought, a few months ago, it would be a comfort to have a look at him, poor dear fellow, even from a distance. I ran down to Weymouth for two nights, intending to pass a couple of days loitering about the quarries till I saw him. I crossed over to Portland, but after I had encountered the first gang of prisoners, I had no heart to go on. Better, I thought, never to see him more than to see him in his disgrace. And then it flashed across me how exquisitely painful it would be for him to be looked upon in his humiliation by any one he loved."

"I can fancy that," replied Miss Fielding softly; "but," she continued, emphasizing her words, "the mother *must* see him again!"

"Impossible!" replied Dainty, as the smoke-wreaths curled between his lips.

"There is nothing impossible to a man, sir," retorted Rosie, sharply.

Ellerton gazed at her for a moment in no little astonishment, and then replied quietly:

"Nor anything unimaginable by a woman."

"I imagine nothing but what is possible," rejoined Miss Fielding.

"If you would give your imaginings definite shape, I

should be a better judge of that point," replied her cousin, curtly.

Rosie stopped abruptly in her walk, paused for a moment, and then exclaimed, in clear ringing tones :

"If I were a man, I would never rest till I had Maurice out of Portland, by fair means or foul. Now, do you understand what I mean?"

As Dainty gazed upon the fresh young face lifted up to the moonlight, and lit up with all the enthusiasm that the wild thoughts within her brain had conjured up, he thought he had never recognised his cousin's delicate beauty before.

"No," he replied at length, "I don't think I do."

"You are dull of comprehension, then," she retorted angrily. "What I mean is this: Prisons have been broke before now. Surely a little assistance from without, and Maurice might soon be clear of Portland."

A faint smile played over Dainty's face as he replied :

"The days of Jack Sheppard are over, child. Men don't escape from their bonds so easy in these times."

"Oh, that I were a man, for his sake!—or that I had any friend who would be a man for my sake," as Beatrice says," exclaimed Rose, passionately. "Will you affirm to me that no one ever succeeds in breaking out of prison it these days?"

"I can hardly say—I don't know—I don't——"

"Stop!" she interrupted, vehemently. "You say you know those parts. Did you never hear of a prisoner escaping?"

"Well, yes. By Jove! now I come to think of it, there was one fellow who got as far as Dorchester; I recollect his being taken in the town when I was quartered there."

"Ah!" she exclaimed, triumphantly—"I knew it. Had he but friends to have helped him, he would doubtless have got clear off. You must try it, Dainty. Of course, he would have to fly abroad, but he could go anywhere. There are places where he would be safe—anything sooner than that he should pass his life in the misery he does now—anything that may place him once more by his mother's side."

She ceased, and stood looking up into his face in

lute passionate appeal; the moonbeams playing through her chestnut tresses, and irradiating her clear-cut, delicate features.

"I am afraid you are talking nonsense, Rosie," he replied, at length. "Escapes from Portland are very rare; and those who have achieved them have, I fancy, been invariably recaptured in the course of a few days."

"What has been done can be done again. If they were re-taken, it was most likely for want of assistance afterwards," replied the girl, sententiously. "Will you try, Dainty, to rescue him?"

And once more Miss Fielding looked anxiously into her cousin's face.

"No," returned Ellerton, somewhat roughly. "But come, it is time to go home, and cease planning hopeless conspiracies."

"It were easily done if there were a man to do it," replied Rosie, bitterly, as with a swift step she turned homewards.

"She must love him very dearly," mused Dainty Ellerton, as he strode along by her side. "But her schemes are preposterous!"

Indignant with the reception of her plans, Miss Fielding bade her cousin a somewhat cold "good night," and betook herself at once to her pillow. As for Dainty, he stood for a quarter of an hour gazing out into the moon-lit street, and musing over Rosie's affection for Maurice—thinking how sad it was that this, also, should be added to the bitter cup it had been their fortune to taste. He smiled as he reflected on Rosie's romantic notions, and thought how awkward would be his situation as an officer in Her Majesty's service, aiding and abetting a criminal to escape from one of Her Majesty's prisons. Well, he need not trouble himself much about that; a very "castle in the air" the idea of rescuing Maurice from his fate, and their all settling down in some foreign land! Yet Dainty thought he could leave the regiment with much less regret now than he could have done a few months back. To start afresh in some country where their story was unknown, was a picture not without its charms to him in his present state of mind.

During the remaining three days of his stay, Rosie returned continually to her point, with all a woman's pertinacity. He might pooh-pooh her, laugh at her, growl at her, snub her, but she insisted on talking about it. She insisted that it was possible. She insisted that it was his duty to rescue Maurice from his degradation—to pour balm once more into his mother's heart. Dainty might pish and psha, and vow she talked the veriest nonsense, but Rosie was inextinguishable.

When a pretty girl dedicates three days to drumming an idea into our heads, although we may deem it a fallacy, regard it as an absurdity, and even laugh at the fair but illogical propounder, yet we do not forget it. We may never act upon it, but it remains with us, a sweet bit of fooling, perhaps, but, withal, to be looked pleasantly back upon.

Now, this was precisely Dainty Ellerton's case; that wild notion of Rosie's was implanted in his brain, had taken no definite shape as yet, but was still there to be turned over and reflected upon. As he steamed back to Newhaven Dainty meditated more upon it than Miss Fielding could have conceived possible, considering the contempt he had held it in, during the last three days. But Ellerton, as we know, was in a morbid frame of mind concerning society just now. He was incessantly attributing motives to society of which society never even dreamt. He conjured up the mocking finger of scorn pointing towards him, when no such finger was ever raised. He mistrusted the world, and deemed it gibed at him when it only smiled.

A man in this state is not unlikely to lend himself to wildest chimeras, and to wrench himself clear of all associations with savage exultation.

Chewing the cud of his morbid imaginings off storm-beaten Beachy Head, we must now leave Dainty for the present.



CHAPTER XVII.

THE WEDDING GUEST.

"**I**T'S truth I'm telling you, Miss Jennie. I was peeping about last night, trying if I could see some of the 'good people' Mr. Weaver's always talking about. It is hard ; I look so often for them, and I never find 'em. Mr. Weaver said 'she'd likely help me,' " continued Nance, waving her hand in the direction of the Well, " but though I've often asked her she won't."

"But where was it you saw him?" inquired Jennie Holdershed. The pair were on the top of that grassy knoll that overhung the Wishing-well, and which commanded such a lovely view of Weymouth Bay. The identical spot, indeed, at which our story commenced.

"Well, it was just by the edge of the wood there ; I was creeping along the wall, when he suddenly sprang over the stile. I saw the face well, for the moon shone down upon it, and then he disappeared down the hill. Mind, I think it was only his wraith," said Nance dropping her voice, "but it was the face of that gentleman who used to go out fishing with you so often before Mr. Weaver came. I hate him."

"Nonsense, Nance," replied Jennie. "If it was he whom you saw, I'm sure he was always very kind to you. You shouldn't hate any one—but certainly not without rhyme or reason."

The elfish child opened her eyes wide, and shook the unkempt locks off her face as she replied :

"Why, you hate him too! Do you mind your wish the day he bid you good-bye; the day you threw your glass into the Well? It's because he angered you that I hate him."

"Hush, Nance," returned the girl, smoothing back the child's hair caressingly, while the blood mounted in her own cheeks. "We often say more than we mean. I was tired and vexed that day. Besides, he's been in sad trouble since, and I'm very sorry for him."

"I don't like him," rejoined Nance, doggedly. "He's born to work you harm. I saw it in the Well one night, and I dreamt it twice,"

"And what did you dream and see?" inquired Jennie, with no little curiosity.

"Always the same thing," whispered Nance. "'She' showed it me first. You were struggling in the water together, and I saw you sink lower and lower, and your struggles grew weaker and weaker, till at last you were both quite still; and then," muttered Nance in awe-struck tones, "you both sank slowly out of my sight, and I knew that you were drowned. All your hair was loose and tangled, your face so pale and still, your eyes closed; but I can never see his face just after the first. I wonder why this is?" said Nance meditatively.

Jennie made no reply. She was lost in thought. Slowly but steadily all this year had her love for Dainty Ellerton been growing up. She had never seen him—never heard from him, but she heard plenty about him from Mr. Weaver. He it was who brought over the paper, and made manifest to her the terrible blow that had fallen upon the Ellertons. The honest, impulsive Irishman was sorely distressed about the whole affair, not only on account of his idol Dainty, but he knew them both. The house had been ever open to him on his stray visits to London, and he was immeasurably grieved at the result of Maurice's trial. He and Jennie had moaned over it together; like a true son of Erin, he grew more amorous as he grew more pathetic; and after having relieved himself of a monody concerning the Ellertons, Tim was wont to endeavour to console both himself and his auditor with a little love-making. He

asked Jennie indeed to marry him every few weeks, and was gravely and regularly refused. It seemed to make no manner of difference in their relations. Mr. Weaver upon these occasions threw much tragedy into his leave-taking.

“Fare thee well, and if for ever,
Still for ever fare thee well,”

was a very favourite quotation of his as he shook hands. To which Jennie, with a merry laugh, was wont to reply, “Ah, mind you come over on Wednesday, if it’s a fishing day. I want some trout, and you must help me to kill some.” Indistinctly muttering something about crushed feelings and wounded pride, Mr. Weaver would bid Miss Holdershed a stately good night. Much emphasis on the “Miss Holdershed”—he always called her Miss Jennie except upon these momentous occasions. But he would reappear again in a day or two, apparently quite oblivious that “me heart and me fortune” had been rejected. The one was a cullender, the other a myth, but it was only in these moments of romantic enthusiasm that Tim ever laid claim to the latter.

At last Jennie rouses herself, and exclaims, “Come, Nance, it’s time to trot home.”

“Will you mind what I’ve been telling you?” asked Nance.

“What was that, child?”

“To beware of that man. What is it they call him? Ellton—Ellton—Elliton, ain’t it?”

“Pool, you little goose! I’m not likely to see him again for one thing, and he’d work me no harm if I did for another.”

“Oh, Miss Jennie! Miss Jennie! don’t be wilful,” cried Nance, earnestly. “It was ‘the Lady’ herself showed it me in the Well. Whatever she shows you there at midnight always comes true.”

Jennie made no answer. She knew perfectly that the child emphatically believed in the “Lady of the Well;” that she was wont to sit by its side peering into its deep, clear waters these summer nights, and fancy she saw pictures in its shadows. She was a child of dreams, with faith in fairies, brownies, apparitions, and visions. Cou-

nected with the world her belief was limited to unmeasured love and trust in Jennie. Who else had ever shown much kindness, or interested themselves in her, little passionate Pagan that she was? With a warm, affectionate heart under her ragged frock, and a quick intelligence beneath her unkempt dishevelled locks all the same—locks, too, that she did make great efforts at times to render smooth, in obedience to Jennie's rebukes for their general untidiness.

By this time they had descended the path through the wood, and were but a few feet above the stream. The Well is only a pool, through which the brook flows, and around two sides of which runs a low stone parapet. Glancing through the bushes, Jennie is aware of a man resting on this parapet. Her heart gives a little jump—just possible she thinks that it may be he with whom her mind is at present occupied, but a second peep shows her that it is only Mr. Weaver.

He is gazing vacantly into the waters beneath him, and no sooner does Nance descry him than Jennie feels a sharp tug at her dress, and over her shoulder comes a quick, earnest whisper.

"Hist! Miss Jennie; maybe she's talking to him."

But Jennie refuses to yield to her follower's superstition, and a pebble, displaced by her feet, rolling down the bank, causes Mr. Weaver to raise his head.

"Ah!" he exclaims, rising, "I've been to look for you at the cottage, and as you weren't there, I thought, maybe, you might be somewhere else."

"Very glad to see you," replied Jennie, as she shook hands with him, laughing. "And you thought somewhere else meant here."

"That's so," returned Mr. Weaver, gravely. "Well, Nance, my woman, have you found the 'good people' yet?"

"No," replied the child. "Do you think there are any in Dorsetshire?"

"'Tis positive I am, as that I'm in these parts," replied Tim, with a droll twinkle in his eye. "Bedad, Nance, we can't have ye throwing doubts upon the neighbourhood in that way."

The child looked at him for a minute with a troubled expression, and then replied petulantly:

"If you mean the folk about here are good, they ain't —except her," and Nance pointed to Jennie.

"Hush, Nance, you little spitfire!" said Jennie, gently; "you don't mean that, you know."

"Yes, I do," replied the child, doggedly. "Nobody is ever good to me but you."

"Och, ye kitten! d'ye mane that I'm not a friend to ye!" inquired Tim Weaver, brusquely.

"I ain't sure," said Nance. "I believe you're telling me lies about the 'good people.'"

"Troth, I never told ye I'd seen thim. I only told ye I'd heard of thim. Maybe, neither you nor I will ever see thim. I never saw 'the Lady' here, but it don't follow, Nance, I never will."

This last bit of casuistry completely vanquished the child, and she bid Mr. Weaver a gracious good-bye before tripping across to her cottage.

"Did you see my uncle?" asked Jennie. "He went into Weymouth to attend an old shipmate's wedding, and I am afraid he will return in what he terms a nor'-nor'-west-by-north state. He usually does from such festivities."

"No. I looked in, but the Captain wasn't at home," replied Tim. "The ould gentleman'll be for seeing the fun out, I'm thinking. But I've something to tell you. Who do you think's at Portland?"

Jennie started slightly, and then replied, "I don't know."

"Maurice Ellerton," said Tim, very gravely; "and it seems he's been for some time, though I only knew it yesterday. It's very sad, you know, for me. It'd break the heart of me to run across him in the prison dress. I quite tremble when I come near a lot of them now, for fear maybe I'd recognise him among them."

"Yes," murmured the girl, softly, "that would be very painful for both of you. We must trust it may never happen. But come in, won't you?" she continued, as they arrived at the cottage.

A very picturesque dwelling was that of Captain Holder-shed, a pretty little one-storied cottage, half smothered in jasmine, passion flower, and Virginia creeper. The little garden that separated it from the road was gay with

flowers, and the walks, grass plots, and borders kept with scrupulous neatness. The dining parlour on the right was fitted up with table, side-board, chairs, etc., of Spanish mahogany, not your gimcrack modern article, but mahogany dark as night, and shining like patent leather. To the left was the sitting-room—not drawing-room, please to bear in mind. A comfortably furnished room enough, with divers easy-chairs, and a huge old-fashioned sofa. A modest book-case contained a supply of somewhat old-fashioned literature. The Waverley Novels, those of Marryatt (much prized by the Captain these last), the Vicar of Wakefield, Burns, Scott's poems and Campbell's, Dibdin's songs, a few odd volumes of the Spectator, etc. But the room contained no piano, for the best of all reasons, there was no one to make use of it had it been there. Nor were there any feminine frivolities, in the shape of work littered about the tables. Crochet, tatting, and embroidery were to Jennie as the mysteries of Eleusis. But there was a ball of twine, a mesh, and a netting needle on the mantelpiece; a half-tied fly, and one of Dickens's novels lay on the little table in the window. A couple of fishing-rods reclined in one corner of the room, and a landing-net in another. A small glazed sailor's hat, with a blue ribbon, hung against the wall, while vases of fresh flowers were everywhere. A few prints, chiefly of a nautical description, decorated the walls, interspersed here and there with an unframed chart or two—reminiscences to the Captain of some voyage of years gone by. Such is Jennie's bower, into which, tossing off her neat boating straw hat, she now ushers Mr. Weaver.

Jennie is somewhat undecided in her own mind as to whether to confide to her visitor that she has good reason to suppose Dainty Ellerton is in the neighbourhood. Nance's vision and dreams are nothing new to Jennie. She has been the confidante of many such, but she believes that upon this occasion Nance has really seen Dainty, and that it is no vague whim of her imagination; still, thinks Jennie, it is quite possible he does not want his presence in these parts to be generally known, and quick-witted Jennie does not deem her open-hearted

admirer just the person to intrust a secret to. Better keep such knowledge to herself, she thinks—at all events, for the present. And then suddenly it flashes across the girl that he may be here to endeavour to communicate with his imprisoned brother. A Portland-bred lass like Jennie is quite aware of the illicit traffic carried on with the prisoners. She knows that there are those on the island who, compelled by the activity of the coast-guard and revenue officers to abandon the more daring and open smuggling of their youth, console themselves with this petty similitude of it, and turn questionable pennies, which they term honest, by the conveying of letters and divers other contraband articles to those within the prison walls, whose friends enable them to pay royally for such luxuries. All this glances through Jennie's mind, in less time than it has taken me to write it. Her heart thrills with exultation as she whispers to herself, if this is so, he will *want me*.

Mr. Weaver, albeit he has contemplated the lady of his love for some minutes with mute admiration, is by no means addicted to such taciturn worship; on the contrary, he is a most loquacious adorer, and now breaks silence with—"Troth, Miss Jennie, there's a dumbness come over you. It's may be you're thinking of how cruel you have been to me lately. If you could but imagine how much sweeter it is to give than to refuse, and how much more becoming a yes is to your pretty lips than a negative!"

"What again, and so soon, sir!" laughed Jennie, while she admonished him with her forefinger. "Don't you know you've no business to get in earnest again for three weeks yet."

"Och, faith!" exclaimed Mr. Weaver, laughing, "who could make love by the almanac? By me soul, I suppose you'd have me only ask your consent when the moon's at the full. It'd be a mighty bad compliment to be paying you."

"How so?"

"Well, they do say," rejoined Tim, his eyes dancing with devilment, "that weak-headed folks are not just responsible for their actions those times."

"Mr. Weaver," cried Jennie, "I see it all now. It's only when you're not quite yourself that you go so far. Ah," she continued, clasping her hands in mock anguish, "to think that I have but one admirer, and that, by his own confession, even he's a lunatic."

"Arrah, Miss Jennie, you know better, it's only funning I am. By the rock of Cashel, I am in downright earnest!"

Again the laughter pealed from the girl's lips as she exclaimed, "Undone, undone! It's only funning he is, in downright earnest."

"If you mean laughing at everything I say," responded Tim, tartly, "maybe the sooner I'm gone the better."

"Nonsense," said Jennie, "you know you're never angry with me. If I have offended I ask pardon;" and as she spoke she rose and dropped him a curtsey. "Will that do, sir?"

"Ah, don't tease," was the good-humoured Irishman's reply; but at this instant fell upon their ears the noise of wheels, and above the noise of the wheels rose gruesome nautical invective, succeeded again by a deep bass voice trolling out in sonorous tones—

"There was little Tom Linstock, of Dover,
Got killed, and left Polly in pain;
Poll cried, but her grief was soon over,
And then she got married again."

"Now then, you swab, who the, etc., etc., told you to lie-to——"

"Jasmine Cottage, Captain," replied the flyman, touching his hat.

"'Spose it is—'spose it is Jas'm Cottage; what of that, sir?" demanded the veteran, fiercely. "Gentlemen don't alway want to go home. Want to cool my head a li'le. Go on, you white-faced, 'sumptive-looking, shiny-hatted son of a grampus!"

The gallant mariner was seated in an open carriage, without his hat, his face beaming, and occasionally mopping the perspiration from his brows with a huge silken bandana, while ever and anon he gesticulated violently with his telescope.

"Mean to mut'ny?" said the Captain. "Got hold

wrong man to stan' zat sort o' thing. Make sail, or by everlastin' what call it, I'll—I'll——"

And here the bibulous old gentleman threatened his contumacious coachman fiercely with his spy-glass.

"Oh, come out, Mr. Weaver. He's in a very nor'-nor'-by-north state, indeed; we must get him in. Uncle! Uncle!" cried Jenny, as she sped down the little garden path.

"Yes, my dear," replied the Captain; "whars matter?"

"Do come in. You're making such a noise, I'm quite ashamed of you!"

"Pretty sort o' shing, zis!" responded the veteran, from his seat in the fly, addressing an imaginary audience. "Come home li'le tired from 'tending 'portant ceremony, and a bit of impudence like you comes out, and says—

'Then drink and sing, hang pain and sorrow,
The halter was made for the neck;
He that's uow——'

How's go on? Forget the rest."

"Come along inside, Captain," interposed Mr. Weaver
"I'm distressed for something to drink."

"Not-ware asked you to tea, sir," retorted the Captain, with much stateliness.

"May we ne'er want a friend, nor a bottle to give him," sang Mr. Weaver, unabashed. "You old cur-mudgeon! D'ye mean to say ye'll not slake the thirst that's consuming me?"

The Captain stared fiercely at his assailant for a minute or two.

"Let 'm'out," he exclaimed, at length. "You're good fellow! I like you, Misser Weaver! Not a 'mudgeon, though. Give us arm; heavy sea on. Not so young as I was."

With Mr. Weaver's assistance, the veteran was at length got into the house; an operation a little retarded by his pertinaciously endeavouring to place both the telescope and his own arm within Mr. Weaver's; and fiercely resisting any other disposition of the former article. At the doorway he paused, to point out to Mr. Weaver the folly of ever getting married, and to explain that the see-

ing an old friend even succumb to such pitiable weakness, had quite upset him for the afternoon.

"Shocking shing, sir! So young, and so depraved! Now, could you think of it? Made many poor fellow take to drink.

'Jack Junk was ill-used by Bet Crocker,
And so took to guzzling the stuff;
Till he tum'mled in old Davy's locker,
And z'here he got liquor enough.'

I say, s'hrikes me, Misser Weaver, we want something to drink. Jenny!—Jenny, I say! Branny and warrer."

"Nonsense, uncle!" returned his niece. "You don't want any more, you can't want any more, and you shan't have any more."

"Well, by—!" cried the Captain, rising, "I'll break the" blank, blank "cupboard open if you don't gi'e me key!"

"Hist, Miss Jennie!" whispered the wily Irishman. "Best let him have one more tumbler; he'll be no further trouble to you then."

The girl took Mr. Weaver's advice, and at once produced the spirit-case and a carafe of fresh water. As Mr. Weaver had predicted, the old gentleman got tranquil immediately, and after a portentous gulp at a very mahogany-looking tumbler he had mixed, exclaimed:

"Snug and comfortable now, eh? Tell you all about 'mazing accident I saw this morning. Just wait till I light my pipe."

But this was not quite so easy. Putting a long clay pipe between his lips, the captain lit a piece of paper, and holding it some two or three inches off the bowl, commenced to puff with great gravity; after about half a minute, he threw the paper into the grate, and considering his pipe all aglow, although the flame and tobacco had of course never come into contact, commenced smoking with much solemnity.

"Tell you now 'bout this 'mazing accident," puff, puff. 'Cussed thing's gone out," and the veteran, having lit another piece of paper, proceeded to go through the above ceremony again. "Tell you all 'bout it now," he remarked at length, puffing with great vigour at the still

unlit pipe. "I had just walked down to the pier as a lugger came in. Well, as she rounded—don't know what 'shevil's matter with the pipe," and once more the veteran solemnly lit a piece of paper, and holding it about half a foot from the bowl, puffed till he was black in the face.

Mr. Weaver could stand it no longer, but burst into a tremendous guffaw. The captain contemplated this outbreak with a fixed stare for some seconds. Slowly it began to draw upon his mind that he was the cause of Mr. Weaver's mirth. From blank astonishment his features gradually changed into an expression of fierce indignation. Suddenly raising the offending pipe, he brought it down with a crash upon the table, and as it splintered into fifty pieces, exclaimed, angrily :

"What the devil are you laughing at, you," blank, blank "'pertinent puppy. Never see a gentleman before with a pipe that wouldn't draw?"

It was in vain Mr. Weaver attempted to apologize ; the veteran was not to be appeased. Gulping down the remainder of his brandy and water at a draught, and growling like distant thunder, out of which such phrases as "'sulted in my own house," "impudent jackanapes," etc., were only to be distinguished, with erratic steps the captain sought his own room.

For a few seconds Jennie and Mr. Weaver sat silently listening to the receding grumbling of the storm, and when suddenly fell upon their ears "Jack Junk was ill-used by Bet Crocker," followed by the angry slam of the ancient mariner's door, they both broke into a burst of uncontrollable laughter.

"Poor uncle," said Jennie at last, "I ought not to laugh at him, and it isn't often, Mr. Weaver, as you know, that he gets as bad as he is to-night. I never saw him so unmanageable."

"Faith I'll go bail he'll be quiet enough now till morning, and so will wish you good night," replied Mr. Weaver.

The girl sat for some time after she was left alone, musing upon this unlooked-for appearance of Dainty Ellerton. What could have brought him back to these parts, unless her conjecture was right ?

"And if it is," she murmured softly, "I shall see him again. Yes, he will have need of me now. I could put him in the way of what he will want to learn. It will be very sweet even to see him again, although Frank, my darling, you must never know how I have thought of you all these long months; how I——" and blushing to the roots of her bonnie dark tresses, Jennie jumped up, leaving her half-whispered sentence unfinished.





CHAPTER XVIII.

FLIGHT OF LAROOM.

MR. LAROOM left the Westminster Courts literally gnashing his teeth with rage and despair upon the termination of Maurice Ellerton's trial. Little likely he would omit to attend that.

True, a ferocious gleam of exultation thrilled his soul as he heard that dread sentence passed upon the man who had beaten him like a hound, whom he deemed his successful rival in Rose Fielding's affections. But all that elaborate scheme of aggrandizement and revenge, which he had concocted with so much care, was blown to the winds. The cobwebs he had been spinning these four years past were brushed away in that one hour; all the money he had accumulated was invested in these mortgages, of which the deeds were but waste paper. If he enjoyed the luxury of revenge upon Maurice Ellerton, yet he had purchased it at the price of his own ruin; while as for Miss Fielding, she had slipped scatheless through his vindictive fingers.

Ruined utterly, and worse than ruined! For Rolf Laroom had signed an agreement by which he made himself liable for that ten thousand pounds which his worthy friend, Mr. Simmonds, had advanced on those forged deeds, in the event of their not proving good legitimate security. The other fifteen he had raised elsewhere. He had laughed at the extreme caution of Mr. Simmonds at the time; he had no doubt then but the investment was

genuine and advantageous; still the ever-sceptical Simmonds, whose life had been passed in making capital of the necessities of his fellows, saw clearly that this money was an urgent requirement with Laroom. He also had deemed the investment perfectly sound, or he would never have embarked in it. But he saw also that Laroom was in pressing need of his assistance, and therefore resolved to make assurance trebly sure that he should run no risk of being a loser by the transaction.

Mr. Simmonds knew perfectly well that Ellerton and Co. would wind up very respectably—that in the long run the creditors would be paid in full—and considered that this hold upon Laroom was quite worth having. After Maurice Ellerton's testimony, he began to think this additional security of not much greater account than those forged deeds upon which he had advanced his ten thousand pounds. But if ever there was a man little likely to submit quietly to such a loss, it was Mr. Simmonds. In his own cold-blooded way he was as remorselessly vindictive as Rolf Laroom himself. He cared for nothing but money. What money would buy, bring, or produce, was all a blank to Mr. Simmonds, except in one thing—to wit, that money properly turned made more money. It was his god, and he worshipped none other. Rich!—he lived most sparingly and unostentatiously. Life had no luxuries, no joys, no sympathies for him; the money article and his business letters his sole reading; the turmoil of the City his Eden. The man was a mere hard, passionless, money-making machine, to be touched only through his pocket; impassable, indifferent to the sufferings of his fellows; equally deaf to their joys, to their miseries; dealing out charity neither to himself nor his neighbours—a devout worshipper of the “golden calf,” and steadfast contemner of all other gods but that.

Such is the man whom Rolf Laroom has unwittingly stricken through the one weak joint in his cynical armour.

The comfortable house in Manchester Square is abandoned, for though the creditors of Ellerton and Co. had refrained from interfering with his privacy, Mr. Simmonds had no such scruples. He had swooped down like a

hawk upon all tangible property that he could discover of his quondam friend's, and was even anxious to attach his person, with the laudable view of wringing from him whether he possessed yet undiscovered resources.

Singular the Nemesis that has overtaken Laroom. He is skulking in obscure lodgings, even as the man he had lured to his ruin skulked but a few weeks previously. Rolf Laroom is close pressed and well-nigh at bay. He dare hardly show himself in the day-time, lest some of the myrmidons Mr. Simmonds has evoked should pounce upon him.

He sits gloomily in his dingy lodgings in Lambeth, musing over his lot generally, glancing with retrospective eye over the game he has played and lost.

"Yes," he mutters, "it was well thought out too; there wasn't a blot in it that I could see. If I had to work it all over again, I could not do otherwise. Who could count upon his committing perjury in that fashion at the finish? For that he did perjure himself, I'd stake my existence; the old gentleman's signature was genuine enough. It was a deep idea! I wonder who put it into his head? I suppose he thought it out. Didn't make much odds to him whether he was convicted of embezzlement with forgery or without. I should think penal servitude for life rather opened his eyes. Still he saved his cousin's fortune, and knocked down mine. It was a great conception," muttered Laroom: "whoever thought of it, and, to do him justice, he never blenched."

A man like Laroom could look with some admiration at the audacity of the villany that had checkmated him. Whether he is right or not in his estimate of Maurice Ellerton's testimony, who shall say? That knowledge can be come at only through Maurice's own confession if it be so, and Maurice has never opened his lips to human being on the subject since he swore to the forgeries.

Rolf Laroom is oppressed with doubts about his own future. His funds are getting low, and he can see no immediate means of replenishing them. There is plenty of hardihood and self-reliance in the man. He is not of the kind that sit gazing vacantly into the grate when they

should be up and doing. A man of resource, of schemes, of energy, of work. He may execrate his luck, look bitterly back upon his life's toil, which has all ended in ruin; but there is no want of determination about commencing again; and with his shrewd head and utter unscrupulousness with regard to the making of money, there is little doubt about his being soon once more in the way of doing so in some shape. What, then, it may be asked, paralyses his energies just now? Simply this—Rolf Laroom is conscious that he has put himself utterly in the power of a bigger scoundrel than himself. He knows that as soon as he got a little business together, Simmonds would descend upon him ruthless and unappeasable, stripping him to the last shilling.

His situation is analogous to that of the hard-working woman with a profligate husband in the dim back-ground—one who sells up the home she has got together with such infinite toil, at uncertain but constantly recurring periods.

Mr. Laroom feels nonplussed. With this terrible dead-weight around his neck how is he to start again in this country? How is he without capital to start elsewhere? In London he feels pretty sure there are people who would advance him a small sum to begin again with, but in London is Simmonds, representative of the daughters of the horse leech. Relentless, unsparing, and thirsting for gold. Watchful, cynical, and suspicious, Simmonds would insist upon plucking him long before he grew plump, for fear he might take flight to foreign parts. What a fool he was to sign that agreement; but when he did so, he looked upon it as the merest form—an instrument that never could come into play against him. A very ominous instrument, as far as he is concerned, just now. It is a pretty piece of retributive justice, that this hawk of the city should have unwittingly fallen into the clutches of a bolder, stronger, more rapacious bird of prey than himself; that he should be cowering in the purlieus of Lambeth to escape from the talons, even as he intended his victims should be hiding from his own marauding claws. When the wolf throttles the fox, the fox meets with scant sympathy in his deaththroes, I ween.

Again and again does Rolf Laroom turn over in his mind what he is to do. Would it be better, he thinks, to meet the inestimable Simmonds boldly, and try to come to terms with him? But Laroom shivers as he recollects what grace he has seen accorded by that money-making machine to impecunious creditors. He has smiled in days gone by at the merciless dealing of this Shylock, but there is little to smile at when Shylock craves his bond from yourself.

"No," he thinks, "if I see Simmonds I'm his slave for life. He knows well my brains are worth his while to buy. He would come to terms, but I should have to subscribe to such terms that nothing but his death could break my chains. I know him too well. I must fly England and begin again elsewhere, almost penniless though it be."

Then he falls to musing again. How would it have been with him had he been loyal partner to Ellerton and Co.? The firm, though somewhat on the decline, was very far from being a rotten concern when he first came into it. Had he but thrown as much energy and shrewdness into the business as he had into his own outside speculations, the house would probably have been thriving yet. And he had meant to do so at first. A blow from a child's hand, and the rejection of what he was pleased to term his love, had turned the whole current of his being. Instead of toiling to sustain that rickety mercantile edifice, he had worked only to destroy it. Well, the crash had come and buried him in it. He, who deemed himself perfectly safe, who had laid by his individual nest egg, and pictured himself rising jauntily from the dust and *débris* of the old house, and commencing a thriving business on his own account, was overwhelmed in its fall. "Yes," he thought at length, "it's all over with me in England; I must get away to America; there must be plenty of openings for a man like me out there. If what the papers tell us of the New York Exchange be true, I think I might do something on that——"

Most decidedly, if the sensational accounts of "corners" in gold and "corners" in Erie, etc., be facts, Rolf Laroom does seem pre-eminently calculated to become a shining

light and successful financier in the purlieus of King William Street. On one point only could one have misgivings about his future career—whether, even, he could be trusted to hold his own among those very “cute” speculators.

Mr. Laroom’s mind was made up. He had determined to go to New York, but he was quite aware that would require some little manœuvring. Simmonds was ophidian in disposition, and, like the boa-constrictor, seldom allowed the escape of a victim.

Still Laroom was subtle of his kind, and though he had little doubt that the mail-train for Liverpool was watched, fancied he would run little risk by an ordinary one. The result proved the correctness of his prognostications, and he arrived in Liverpool unmolested. There he put up at a quiet inn not very far from the quay, and, having taken his passage, quietly awaited the day of embarkation.

The generality of individuals who have strong private reasons for shunning publicity regarding their departure for foreign lands, fall into the mistake of going on board the steamer they have selected for that purpose at the last moment. Fatal error! It is precisely at that time that the eyes and faculties of the police are most awake; it is then that every passenger is most carefully scrutinised, if they have reason to suppose there is amongst them one whom it is their mission to lay hands upon. Rolf Laroom thoroughly comprehended the folly of such procedure, and went on board his ship at a somewhat early hour, and quietly retreating to his berth, remained there till they were clear of the Mersey. He had good cause, for the Liverpool police had received their orders concerning him, and had they chanced to discover him, his trip to America would have been postponed indefinitely.

From the pages of this history Mr. Laroom now disappears finally. He met with varied success upon his first start in New York, but in process of time became a sleek, unctuous citizen, a prominent member of the Tammany ring, a steady attendant at church—was known to have been in very profitable “corners” of divers descriptions, and, in the language of the West, to have “made his pile.”

Men's merits do not always meet their deserts in this world, nor do the evil-doers pay invariably the penalty of their misdeeds; audacity, hypocrisy, and dishonesty, at times, go about clothed in very comfortable broadcloth, and in their own carriages. And, alas! it is to be feared, very little troubled with the gnawings of conscience or remorse.





CHAPTER XIX.

JENNIE'S WISH FULFILLED.

JENNIE HOLDERSHED has gone on dreaming day-dreams, and drinking in stories of Dainty Ellerton, such as are only told by a man who narrates the exploits of his school-days; and Jennie can no longer disguise from herself that she feels a passion for this wandering hussar, that is all unwarranted, as far as anything he has ever said to her is concerned. She does not quite know how it has all come about even now. She liked him well enough in the old fishing days. Nay, Jennie, searching heart fiercely and scornfully, will admit "very much;" but she didn't love in those times. Very positive of that is Jennie. How is it, then, that mentioning this man's name makes her cheeks flush and her veins tingle? How is it that her ears are so greedy to drink in aught relating to him, that she craves to talk of him, that she can sit for hours while Mr. Weaver narrates some one or other of Dainty's boyish triumphs or escapades, with all the fervour and enthusiasm of his excitable temperament? She never tires of listening to such histories, and is kinder than usual to the Irishman, when in his loyal devotion to the hero of his boyhood he winds up his story with a peroration of honest eulogy. Not a girl either was Jennie to let her heart go lightly out her keeping. She takes shame to herself even now that it is so. How is it that this man, who has never wooed her,

has taken such hold of her fancy, leaving her to confess sadly that

“Between the sunset and the sea
My love laid hands and lips on me?”

It is the old paradox—those who woo earnestly often woo vainly; while those who love lightly, are wept for and mourned. We are always rejecting the grapes to our hand, in our wild endeavours to clutch those out of reach. What put Dainty Ellerton into her head? He had never whispered love speeches in her ear; and yet Jennie owns sorrowfully to herself that his turn has been as well served as if he had spent all those bright mid-summer days in such passionate murmurings.

“I am a fool,” she murmured. “I hate myself that I cannot tear him from my heart. I despise myself for so loving him. He! who has probably never wasted a thought upon me—who, if he has, thinks of me only as a girl who served to wile away the idle hours of his sojourn here. And yet I cannot blame him. It is no fault of his. Ah! thrice-stricken fool, what madness possessed you to give your love unasked, unsought!” and the hot tears stood in Jennie’s eyes as she thought how that love might be scorned, or at least rejected, should sign of it ever escape her. No! he must never learn it. He was in the neighbourhood now; she must keep close watch on tongue and eye, to see they did not betray her. It is easy for some women to disguise their love. With them it flows in placid streams, that never overflow their banks; but with their wilder, more passionate sisters, it foams and frets, till at times it passeth their control, and they find, alas! how

“Lightly shall a woman’s will slip out,
The foolish little winged will of her,
Through cheek or eye, when tongue is charmed asleep.”

They have more stormy times these last, doubtless. They are liable to such shipwreck of their affections as those even-tempered daughters of Eve never run risk of; but, on the other hand, they taste such delirium of happiness as those others cannot hope to imagine.

Jennie wanders, a morning or two after she has heard

of Dainty Ellerton's re-appearance, along the banks of the trout-stream that she has so often fished in his company. The girl, however, carries no rod with her upon this occasion, but strolls listlessly along, wrapped in her own reflections. She feels sure that she will see him before long, and anticipates that meeting with mixed sensations of pleasure and pain. To a woman of Jennie's warm passionate temperament, the idea of once more standing face to face with the man she loves is clothed with infinite sweetness. But then comes the bitter reflection, that the man she loves is not her lover. She turns over and over again in her mind his every look, his every word, and gathers no crumb of consolation from doing so. She cannot cheat herself into the belief that he has ever manifested a sign of affection towards her. She recalls his last good-bye; she understands now how it was that she felt so angered at his indifference, though she would not admit to herself at the time that she had any regard for him. Ah! well, she knows better now—better, forsooth, and Jennie's face flushes as she thinks of her love given to a man who is blind and indifferent to it. Better, she thinks, those days when she could still make shift to deny it.

She wanders on, till she comes to a high hedge, which necessitates her diverging a little from the bank, in order to obtain the use of the gateway. As her hand touches the hasp, the subject of her meditations stands before her. A low cry escapes her lips, and she trembles slightly.

"Jennie!" he exclaims, extending his hand, "I am very glad to see you. Won't you welcome me back?"

For a second or two she had scarcely noticed his outstretched hand, but his last words called her attention to it, and she shook hands silently with him.

His eyes flashed upon her, and he gazed keenly into her face for a moment, and then said:

"Pardon me, I forgot—it is possible you might prefer not meeting me again. You have doubtless heard of our disgrace."

"Frank!" cried the girl, passionately, still clinging to his hand, "how can you say such things to me? Yes, I have heard of your trouble, and no one could have been

more grieved about it than I was. You might have known me better than to think otherwise, if you had ever cared to judge me aright."

She flung his hand away from her petulantly; for the first gust of her passion over, she felt indignant that he could have thought so meanly of her.

"Forgive me, Jennie," he replied gravely. "I know that I'm perhaps over-sensitive on this point, but I've been sorely tried. The world is apt to gather up its skirts when it encounters those with a tainted name."

She turned to him again with one of those quick gestures peculiar to herself, and looked into his face. The low, sad, sorrowful tone in which he spoke, so different from his old, easy, *nonchalant* manner, moved her strangely. And now she looked at him she was struck with his worn, haggard aspect. Dainty had felt his brother's disgrace bitterly. In his eyes Maurice was past the sympathy of all honourable men. He had sinned past all redemption. Mrs. Ellerton and Rosie, in their pity for the offender, were morally blind to the enormity of the offence. But it was not so with Dainty. He grieved sincerely that the brother he so loved should have so fallen. But he saw his crime in all its nakedness and deformity. He glossed it over not an iota.

Jennie looked at him for some seconds in silence; he was switching the tops off a thistle idly with his cane. Suddenly she caught his hand in hers, and, as the tears welled into her eyes, exclaimed softly, "I am truly sorry for you—you ought to have known that I should ever sympathise with you in trouble."

He bent forward and laid his lips lightly on her brow. "Thanks," he said. "Do you remember what you said when you bade me good-bye?"

"Yes," she replied, gently, still holding his hand in hers, "but I am sorry for my words now."

"I hope not; for I have much need of your help, Jennie."

"Ah!" she cried, with an impatient movement of her head, and dropping his hands, "why will you always misunderstand me? It sounds as if I had wished trouble might come to you, and I didn't mean that."

"No, hardly that, I believe; but, Cassandra-like, you hoped we might never meet till I had need of you. They were words of prophecy. We meet again, and I want your help."

"I guessed it would be so," replied Jennie, "as soon as I heard you were in these parts again. You wish to establish a communication with your brother?" Dainty bent his head silently. "No difficulty about that. If I have never been employed in that nefarious traffic myself, I know where to put my hand on plenty who will do your bidding, if you only pay for it."

"Thanks," replied Frank Ellerton; "I want a letter conveyed inside, that is all."

"Is that to be all?" inquired the girl, in a quick fierce whisper. "If you have money to spend, won't you try for more than that? If brother of mine were there, I'd have him out at all hazards."

"Curious," thought Dainty; "here is another who deems Maurice's escape quite feasible." And then Dainty reflected that Jennie Holdershed's opinion carried some weight with it. Born on the Rock, and conversant with every hole and crannie of it, she should be some judge of whether such an enterprise had any chance of success.

"I doubt that is not to be accomplished," he replied quietly.

"Not to be accomplished!" exclaimed the girl vehemently. "No! not unless he be bold of heart and cunning of hand. Not unless he can watch patiently and untiringly for his opportunity. But to such the chance comes always. Mark me, Frank. Remember what I tell you, and act upon it. Those who bide their time can generally escape from Portland prison if they have courage. But it is the escaping from Portland Rock afterwards that is the great difficulty; they are always retaken."

"Then there is little advantage to them breaking prison," he replied moodily. "They are doubtless punished for such misdemeanour when captured."

"Yes; and yet it is possible that a man might get clear off, if he had but friends outside to help him."

"How so?" asked Dainty.

"Because the only chance of getting off the Rock is by

water. Those who have got out of prison so far have never had friends to help them in that way. But if they had known where to find a boat to take them off, if they could have counted upon a cutter lying off in the West Bay, the probabilities are they might have made good their escape."

Dainty was getting interested in the conversation.

"But did that never occur to any of them, think you?" he asked.

"Doubtless," replied Jennie; "but all that requires not only friends outside, but friends with considerable means. The poor wretches who have broken out so far have had nothing but their own resources to depend upon; they have had but very imperfect knowledge of the locality besides; and yet with all that against him, one of them did actually get off the Rock, and as far as Dorchester, before he was recaptured."

"I recollect it. I was quartered at Dorchester at the time. We must have some further talk about this, Jenny; but, in the meanwhile, I want this letter sent to Maurice."

"Give it me," replied the girl. "I'll tell Nance—you recollect her—to go over to Portland, and see about it. The imp had plenty of that sort of work before her father settled at Upway, some three years back. They are Portlanders bred and born, like myself."

"Yes, I remember Nance; but, Jenny, the girl has conceived a strange aversion to me. I think she'd probably do me a bad turn in this business."

"Not if I send her. She'd be true as steel to me, whatever it might be; and, with her elfish cunning, she's a very reliable messenger."

"If I lack trust in her, I put implicit confidence in you, so do as you think best about it. How is the Captain?"

"Not one whit more reconciled to kid gloves than when you were here last. He has been in a very nor'-west-by-north state lately; and I took advantage of his being rather unwell, the other morning, to administer a severe philippic with his tea and toast, about the ultimate fate of wine-bibbers, and to point out where nor'-westers were likely to carry him."

"And I trust he was penitent," said Dainty, laughing.

"Very much so. Excused himself by saying that seeing an old friend spliced was the thirstiest and most affecting sight on earth (he had been at a wedding, you must know), and that henceforth he intended to avoid all such exciting ceremonies."

"Which resolution, let us trust, he may keep to," rejoined Dainty.

"Oh, it don't much matter," said Jennie, with a quick glance from under her lashes, and a half-comic elevation of the eyebrows. "Uncle sees such sad, marvellous, and thrilling sights through that glass of his, that he is never without an excuse for taking something; as he says, just to support the nervous system—'stiffners,' he calls them. He says the wickedness of his fellow-creatures makes him feel limp."

"Ah!" returned Ellerton, laughing, "whether it's weddings or funerals, it comes to the same thing to him."

Jennie nodded.

"Do you know," she said, after a slight pause, as she walked slowly along the edge of the river, "that I have been imparting the fishing lore you taught me, to an old friend of yours—Mr. Weaver."

"What Tim? Yes, his regiment arrived just before I left. I told him he'd have to take to fishing here."

"Well, a pretty mess he made of it to begin with; but when I found he was a friend of yours I took compassion on him."

"That would go a long way towards reconciling him to the pursuit," rejoined Dainty, smiling, to whom the susceptibility of Mr. Weaver was well known.

"What do you mean?" inquired Jennie, sharply.

"My dear Jennie, don't be angry, but my friend Tim's devotion to your sex is notorious. I'm quite sure he has paid due homage to your charms."

"No more, sir, than a tolerably good-looking girl might lay claim to," retorted Jennie, somewhat mendaciously, for she is aware the Irishman's devotion is exceptional.

"There's no doubt Tim Weaver speaks highly of trout fishing as a 'diversion,'" observed Dainty, rather amused.

The blood flew to Jennie's temples, and her grey eyes lightened, as she replied, rapidly:

"He was not so much wrapped up in himself as to fail to discover that his companion was worth looking at. He has the gallantry of his nation, and is not called upon to put on the affected manners of a dragon."

Dainty started—he knew that this girl had a feeling for him when he was last down in those parts, and he saw now that it still existed. He gazed at her with no little curiosity, but she turned her head away from him, and kept her eyes stedfastly on the ground. For the first time he was struck with her tall, graceful figure; with the rich masses of her brown hair, with the long dark lashes that now veiled the flashing grey eyes. For the first time he noticed her easy supple walk, and his eye was attracted to the well-turned ankle that ever and anon peeped forth from beneath her blue serge walking dress. He had thought of her vaguely before as a good-looking girl, but he awoke to the consciousness that she was a very handsome one.

As I have said before, he was a man strangely indifferent to feminine attractions. It was not that he did not mingle in woman's society, because he did a good deal, until his brother's crime made him so keenly sensitive regarding all society. But as long as he found a woman agreeable, Dainty had always been curiously blind to her personal attractions. He would spend an evening in pleasant talk with a lady either plain or *pasée*, would yawn at times when one whose beauty was beyond dispute had condescended to put forth all her powers of enchantment for his subjugation; had monopolized the belle of the ball for half an hour at others, and yet been all unconscious that she was such. There was no awakening enthusiasm with regard to woman's beauty in Dainty; "good-looking" was the utmost it was possible to extract from him. Yet he made one exception, and that was, a lady with soft grey hair, and turned of fifty. It was his mother.

And now for the first time in his life Dainty is musing seriously on a girl's looks, and the more he gazes stealthily at Jennie Holdershed, the more he awakens to the consciousness of what a handsome girl she is.

Rather awkward, he thinks, this last speech of hers.

He feels conscious of having been somewhat remiss in the matter of attention to Jennie all last summer. She might almost have been a man as far as he was concerned, so completely did he regard her as a mere sister of the angle to whom he had been first attracted by seeing her pursue her sport in base, poaching, unorthodox fashion—to wit, *with a worm*. In mere compassion for her ignorance had he first introduced himself to her, and had felt, in the beginning, much wrath because she failed to carry out his instructions. Latterly he had condescended to own that she would throw a good fly with practice. Still, despite his neglect, Dainty is quite conscious that he has some hold over this girl. Her very petulance is proof of it.

They had walked on in silence for some time, absorbed in the above reflections: it had never occurred to Dainty to break it. His imperturbability is one secret of his success in society. The necessity for speaking when we have nothing to say, of which most of us are painfully conscious, never disturbed Dainty Ellerton. Much conversation connected with the weather, and similar inanities, takes its rise from that morbid alarm that characterises us when a pause takes place in the small talk in which we have embarked. The feverish impatience of speech that distinguishes the “morning caller,” is familiar to most of us.

Jennie can bear it no longer. She is conscious that her tongue waxed bitter in her last remark.

“Have I offended you, Mr. Ellerton?” she exclaims, somewhat brusquely, “that you have nothing to say to me?”

“Not at all,” returned Dainty quietly. “I was thinking, on the contrary, how it was that I had offended you.”

“I have some right to feel angry!” cried the girl, as she stopped and looked him proudly in the face. “You jeer at me because a friend of yours holds me in higher esteem than you do—because another can admire one whom you regard so lightly. I don’t want to boast, Frank, but there are many who call me handsome, though you don’t. You need not sneer because Mr. Weaver likes

fishing with me ; there are plenty who ~~would~~ be glad to take his place, believe me."

"I have no doubt of it. If I smile at the havoc you have made with Tim Weaver's heart, it is simply because I know his besetting weakness, and have so often seen him succumb without a tithe of his present excuse."

Dainty uttered the last words gravely and pointedly. Jennie cast a quick, jealous look at him as he finished, to see if she might detect any sign of mockery in his face ; but his quiet gaze of unmistakeable admiration made her drop her eyes hastily. She knew that he was no longer blind to her personal attractions.

"Good-bye," she said at length. "I will see you about this letter. You will come and look at us before long," and she extended her hand.

He clasped it closely, and made a half effort to draw her to him ; but she extricated herself quickly from his grasp, and, with a sharp, petulant nod, sped away home.





CHAPTER XX.

NEWS FROM WITHOUT.

MAURICE ELLERTON, having been duly furnished by the astute Mr. Blades with writing materials, has written a letter to his brother, which that worthy has undertaken to forward by what he facetiously designates "the underground mail." At the expiration of a couple of days, he whispers to Maurice that he has done so. Very sanguine and hopeful is the latter upon receiving this assurance; and, before a week has elapsed, he is impatiently expecting a reply. He questions Mr. Blades, whenever opportunity offers, eagerly on this subject, and chafes when that experienced criminal preaches patience to him.

"You see," said Blades, "our mail ain't quite as regular as the ordinary post. Then, again, the chap you've wrote to, he ain't up to the move. He'd probably not be at the address you gave. He ain't expectin' to hear from you, and the letter might have to follow him about a bit. But don't you be down-hearted, he'll be awake to the underground post after a little, and then you'll hear regular."

Still, if Maurice fretted at the delay, yet the mere sending of that letter had done him good. He had something—not much, it may be; but nevertheless, something—to look forward to. It had aroused the man from the leaden apathy into which he had sunk.

When life has fallen for us into a dull, hopeless uniformity, it is surprising with what interest we can expect the slightest incident that threatens to trouble its stagnant waters.

Maurice rose every day, now, with the possibility of receiving a letter. True, the day seemed to bring nothing but disappointment; yet was there not the morrow which might make atonement for all such miscarriage of expectations? And what was it, after all, that he watched and waited for? Only a letter. For as yet no other scheme possessed Maurice's brain. He simply craved to hear from those dear to him, oftener than the prison regulations allowed. Twice a year is not much to receive intelligence of those we love. That was all Maurice was at present entitled to. Time and good conduct might produce further indulgence in this respect. In the meanwhile, how sluggish were the wings of time!

"Only a letter!" three words that may mean so much—may mean so little. Hearts have grown sick, and eyes waxed dim waiting for only a letter. Cheeks have blanched, and tongues have faltered, as day after day they sought the post office for only a letter, and went wearily homewards after the official's curt reply of "Not to-day, ma'am." A *poste-restante* is a painful study to a philosopher. It is not to be comprehended in a day. You must hover about it for weeks. After a time you will know the anxious faces as well as the clerks. There are travellers, who rush up and claim their letters, tolerably indifferent as to whether they find any or not—who thrust them, after one hurried glance at the superscription, into their pockets, and go their way. It is not of these we would take note. Mark that pale woman, neatly dressed, but whose attire shows palpably that she fights a dour, silent struggle with the world. Listen to her soft, quivering inquiry; see her head bowed meekly as that glib negative to which, alas! poor soul, she is too well accustomed, meets her ear. See this trim, coquettish damsel, with cheeks all aglow, and the light of love in her eyes; how she blushes as she stammers forth her inquiry—how she clutches her treasure, and how her lips part in a rippling smile as

she trips lightly away! Ha! my friend here I think we all know. Coat rather closely buttoned up; hat a trifle shiny, and worn a little on one side—yes, evidently the gentleman who is always expecting remittances. Freely translated, that means he has sent out borrowing circulars to all his friends and acquaintances, and has just looked in to see if anything has come of them. But enough of the *poste-restante* of general life; it is with the *poste-restante* of Portland prison that we have to do.

Mr. Blades making his way, under the auspices of a warder, towards the blacksmith's shop—scene of his daily labours—and meditatively reflecting that he should like to have done the breakfast he has lately disposed of, about twice more, suddenly murmurs to himself, as his eyes rove restlessly around:

“Hum! something from without. Wonder what it is? Just at present, I think a Bologny sausage would be the thing I should like best to drop upon.”

The air of Portland is keen; Mr. Blades's appetite is large; and the consequence is, that gentleman is very far from satisfied with the dieting.

“It ain't the quality I complains of,” he remarks, pathetically; “but what's the use of supposing a first-class burglar eats no more nor a sparrow? It's a mockery! It's a mere keeping us alive, that's what it is! Wait till I get out, and see if I support a liberal Government again, that's all! I'm all for Mr. D'Israeli, the Conservative lot, and the old rations. If anybody would stand anything in this here inhospitable establishment, I'd give 'em the times of Sir Joshua Jebb, and it's sorry I am he's gone.”

The uninitiated would have been sorely perplexed to indicate upon what grounds Mr. Blades had so confidently announced that there was something from without awaiting him. There was apparently nobody in the quarry through which he was passing, except the various gangs of prisoners, and the warders in charge of them. Nothing to lead a bystander to suppose that an attempt to communicate with any one of the former was being made. Who was to make it? There was no one except those connected

with the prison to be seen. That is the custom of those who undertake to supply these grey-coated outcasts with surreptitious luxuries. The "good people" who provide the convicts with interdicted comforts are as sensitive about being seen as the "good people" for whom poor Nance makes such unavailing search.

But if we follow the keen, furtive glances of Mr. Blades, we shall see that they are attracted to a small heap of waste by the side of the road. Waste is the chipping and splinters that are cut from the stone in shaping it into rough blocks, after it has been raised. There are numberless heaps of such strewn on either side of the way, and it is curious why this particular pile should have such a peculiar attraction for the burglar. Wherein does it differ from any of the similar accumulations that surround it, one cannot tell; yet Mr. Blades has no doubt that, when he gets the opportunity of lifting the top stone or two, he will find a tiny parcel or letter beneath them.

Looking more closely, one perceives a small piece of broken crockery on the summit, on which again rests a small pebble; that is the sign—more properly, one should say a sign, for there are many such, all readily comprehended by the old hands within the prison.

But although a parcel may be thus deposited—though the spot where it lies concealed may be speedily recognised by the prisoner for whom it is intended, yet he has still to await an opportunity to possess himself of it. Bill Blades, marching with his fellows to the blacksmith's shop, admits ruefully that he does not quite see how he is to get at that heap of waste, except under the keen gaze of a warder. Were he working in the quarries, it would be simple. There is a risk, too, in delay of some other prisoner recognising the sign, and having, from the situation of his work, more favourable opportunities of finding and appropriating the parcel. Mr. Blades is far too experienced a man of the world to have any reliance on that musty old adage of "Honour among thieves."

"It might come to one all right, if it's only a letter," he mused; "but if it's anything else, the chance would be mighty poor." And though Mr. Blades has put Maurice

Ellerton in the way of receiving a letter, yet his friendship does not extend so far but that he would infinitely prefer to find two or three sticks of tobacco on his own account, instead of that response for which Maurice so yearns. Such regard for one's own interests is not altogether peculiar to the confines of a prison.

Bill Blades, as he hammers and forges in the blacksmith's shop this morning, ruminates much upon how he is to find an opportunity for investigating that heap of waste, but all to no purpose. "Them warders are so plaguy officious," he mutters, querulously. "Why, if my boot-lace did happen to come undone just opposite that bit of crockery, one of 'em would be bound to stop and see how I tied it up again."

As he spoke, he was busy raking some cinders together, with which he replenished the fire. Suddenly something glittering caught his eye amongst the *débris*.

"Halloa! you're a find!" he muttered—"I'll have you." He glanced stealthily round for a moment, and saw that no notice was just then being taken of his proceedings; he stooped, and in a second a bit of wrought steel about four inches long was concealed in the garter-band of his knickerbockers. "That's the makings of a knife, any way," thought Mr. Blades, with a grin.

By the time the recall-bell rang he had made up his mind what to do. He saw, as he marched back to the hall, that the piece of crockery was still there. He determined to tell Maurice Ellerton about it. Maurice was working in that vicinity just now, and could, he thought, easily manage to approach the heap without attracting attention. As they file off to their respective cells for dinner, Mr. Blades, living in the same hall, has no difficulty in getting next Maurice Ellerton, and in that low tone peculiar to such places, communicates to him his discovery. Maurice's eyes gleam at the intelligence; still he listens attentively to his companion's counsel, and very emphatic is Mr. Blades upon the wisdom of taking things coolly.

"Don't you be in a flurry," says that worthy; "bide your time, and if it's a note, why, your boot's as handy a place to stow it as any. If it's more, slip it in the garter

strap of your knickerbockers, and inside the leg, mind. The warders usually run their hands down outside, when they search us as we come in from work."

To all of which, delivered in a low voice, and with almost motionless lips, Maurice promised to pay due attention. Very curious is this bated language of the prison; characteristic of the criminals of all nations, in whatever tongue it may be couched. It is the art of modulating the voice so as to be almost beyond the knowledge of any but the person addressed, while the lips are so slightly moved, that a bystander would never suspect them of speaking. It is extraordinary how soon prisoners acquire this manner of speech, although perhaps not to be wondered at, since man has mostly a sore yearning to hold communication with his fellows. Debarred from open conversation, he soon acquires this semi-silent tongue. Maurice Ellerton had already graduated thus far in the freemasonry of crime.

At last the dinner hour is over, the cells are once more unlocked, the prisoners pour forth in obedience to the summons, and are marched off in their respective gangs to their work. Maurice's eyes rove keenly around as they enter the east quarry, and before his party is broken off to resume their accustomed toil, he has discovered the piece of delf that Blades had described to him. His heart beats quick, although he expects but a letter. Yet how is he to get it? True, his labour takes him very near to that heap of waste, but still he will have to diverge some short distance to get to it, and the attention of the keen-eyed warder in charge would be instantly aroused at his straying those thirty yards or so from the chain of barrows it is his lot to be employed with. It is cruelly tantalizing, but he bears the advice of his astute friend, Mr. Blades, in mind, to be patient and await his opportunity.

Three hours pass away, during which Maurice, wheeling incessant barrow-loads, is sometimes near, sometimes far away from that mysterious piece of delf. Once he found himself with an empty barrow within twenty yards of it. He lounged carelessly from his barrow: he was within six paces of it, when the stern voice of the warder

called to him to keep by his work. Maurice began to despair. Help came to him in an unexpected shape. We may regret it, we may ignore it, we may even deny it; but at the bottom of our dispositions, however kept in restraint by culture and education, there still exists "the animal"—those fierce passions which, when uncontrolled, reduce us to the level of the beasts. "The animal" at times seems to possess men of high position, as well as those who have barely risen above the brute creation. Henry VIII., and some of the Roman Emperors, are cases in point. The French Revolution (I speak of the first) offered hundreds of examples. Carrier, who inaugurated the republican wedding, is perhaps as good a type of the human tiger, broken loose, rampant, and uncontrolled, as one could mention. What cold-blooded butchery happened when Carrier went down to the Loire, we have all read.

James Carnoul, chafing in his chains at Portland, is one of these men in whom "the animal" constantly preponderates, to the utter obscuration of his reason. There are times, when the fit comes upon him, that this man is as uncontrollable as a wild beast, and amenable to no other coercion than such as a Van Amburgh resorts to with his four-footed prototype. "Chafing in his chains" is altogether figurative as regards Carnoul. He has arrived at the distinction of a leg iron—a band of steel riveted round the ankle, from which run two long links, the other end attached to his waist belt.

Carnoul, upon this afternoon, has one of his outbreaks. It takes a somewhat ludicrous form. He is employed at a huge crane, adjusting the slings with which to raise the cut stone on to the trucks destined to carry it away. Suddenly "the animal" moved him to clamber rapidly to the top of this crane, from which exalted position he in powerful language consigned his fellows, the prison authorities, and the world generally, to perdition. He refused positively to come down. He sat there and cursed. In ferocious language he informed the warders that he would break the neck of any one who should presume to attempt to fetch him down. The situation was absurd. There

were plenty of volunteers among the prisoners to aid the warders ; but the latter were circumspect. The crane was upwards of thirty feet high, and a desperado like Carnoul might easily hurl any one approaching him to the ground. Still authority could not be defied in this wise. It was the criminal banning the representatives of the law from the summit of the gallows.

But wily men swarm up the guys connected with the crane ; ropes are thrown dexterously from one to the other, and in a few minutes Carnoul is sufficiently pinioned to be approached ; two or three minutes more, and handcuffed, and foaming with rage, he is marched off in custody of the warders to the punishment cells.

This incident had naturally attracted the attention of all engaged in the quarries. Maurice saw his opportunity, and walked swiftly to the piece of delf. He turned over the two or three stones beneath it, and found a small packet wrapped up in oil-cloth. Hastily concealing it, he joined the circle who were gazing at Carnoul, and witnessed the downfall of that worthy.

Very impatient now is Maurice that work should be over. He longs to find himself locked up in his cell, that he may examine his treasure ; and never, perhaps, even when the toil had been the heaviest strain to his unaccustomed muscles, had he welcomed the sound of the recall bell so eagerly as to-night. Will he be satisfied ? These much looked-for letters sometimes carry sore disappointment when they come to hand.

Steadily the numerous parties of prisoners tramp through the quarries and disappear within the prison gate. The convict guards vanish through the black portal, and the wild grey chaos of broken stone lies silent. Not a living soul apparently amidst those pits, those heaps, those vast masses of wrought stone. The gigantic cranes loom out dark and weird in the failing light, like so many evil genii, fell guardians of the place. Suddenly from a heap of *débris* on the extreme verge of the quarry, rises an unkempt poorly-dressed girl, and stretches herself with a sense of relief. She well may, for she has passed the day there crouching, watching—her eyes ever intent on that piece of delf, or rather on the heap

that she knows it is upon, for she is too far off to distinguish it.

"Well, I may go now," she exclaims wearily. "I can tell Miss Jennie that one of 'em's got it, anyway;" and with a shrug of her shoulders, Nance sped rapidly through the quarry, and wended her way towards **Easton.**





CHAPTER XXI.

MAY I SAY IT ?

DAINTY ELLERTON has established himself at Weymouth, in lodgings near the harbour, and there broods much over the possibility of his brother's escape. The idea originally implanted in his mind by Miss Fielding has been fostered of late by Jennie Holdershed. He has constant interviews with Jennie, and the girl has already found that this subject has a strange fascination for him. There is perhaps a taint of the old smuggling blood in Jennie's veins. At all events, her sympathies are apt to be with those who are in antagonism with the law. She has her own views upon the feasibility of an escape from Portland, and, as we have already seen, deems it quite practicable, providing assistance is furnished from without.

To Dainty's jaundiced mind this is rapidly becoming an affair that it behoves him to attempt at all hazards. He argues sophistically that the stain on their name will be in some measure washed out when Maurice is rescued from a felon's doom; that, for the love he bears his mother, he is in duty bound to restore Maurice to her arms; that even Rose Fielding looks to him to set her lover free, for that Rose is in love with his brother, Dainty has now no doubt. All these reasons, conjoined with his morbid sensitiveness to society's nods and inuendoes, have determined him to snatch Maurice, if possible, from the fate to which the law has doomed him. This may sound unnatural, but it must be borne in mind that his

brother's shame has affected Dainty Ellerton very strongly; that, in a somewhat different way, he feels it as acutely as his mother. Mrs. Ellerton can only think of the hardships that Maurice has to undergo—of the severity of his punishment. Dainty dwells more on the hopeless disgrace—on the total want of honour displayed by the brother he so looked up to.

It would be a great mistake to suppose that Dainty Ellerton's taking up his abode at Weymouth attracted any attention there. To begin with, when quartered at Dorchester, he had never much frequented the little watering-place, he had never been a loungee of the esplanade; and even when staying there the previous year, had passed his days in the country, fishing principally. The circumstances of a trial like Maurice's soon fade from the memory of the public; and, moreover, although Mr. Weaver, as an officer of the Portland garrison, had chanced to discover that Maurice was an inmate of the prison, yet Weymouth was quite unaware of that fact. The grim bastille keeps its own secrets, and is chary of admitting visitors. The outside world know little about who may be amongst its fifteen hundred inmates.

Dainty Ellerton passes his days at present between roving over the Isle of Portland and strolling about the neighbourhood of Upway with Jennie. He has awoke at last to her beauty. Then the girl's genuine, honest sympathy for his trouble is inexpressibly soothing to him. He, so jealous and suspicious of the kindly attentions of society, abandons himself, with a sense of relief, to Jennie's quiet, hopeful talk, and wonders how it was he never remarked her quick, graceful gestures before. She may not be accomplished, but she is, nevertheless, by no means uneducated, with strong common sense, and a keen sense of fun and humour, that give much zest to her conversation. Better worth talking to, he thinks, than half the women you meet with in society. Moreover, love is apt to beget love, when the opportunity is vouchsafed it; and, without being a coxcomb, Dainty is justified in thinking that Jennie cares a good deal about him. Jennie, with her frank, impulsive manner, and her every thought reflected in her bonnie face, is not apt at conceal-

ing her feelings. She was in love with him before, and she is so sincerely sorry for him now. Her woman's wit quickly showed her how deep this wound was. She recognised at once the great change that had come over him—how the *insouciant* hussar of a year ago had changed into a moody, suspicious, irritable man. She soothed him, amused him—more still, she acquired his confidence. Dainty spoke to her as he had never spoken yet to any one of his brother's crime; told her, what he had never even breathed to his mother or cousin, that his present life was insupportable; that he must leave the army. Jennie listened in silence; she did think herself that it would, perhaps, be best for him to throw the old life behind him, and to start afresh in another land, but Jennie kept her thoughts to herself. She did not feel qualified to give an opinion on that subject. A preposterous piece of modesty, such as rarely hinders our acquaintance from bestowing advice upon us.

But Jennie knew what she could do. She saw what she might be to him now. She felt that it did him good to talk to her. She could combat this morbid idea that his brother's disgrace extended to himself, though, it was true, she made little impression on this subject. Dainty would shake his head drearily, and reply:

"You don't understand the world, Jennie. Society is always ready to believe that a great criminal's connexions only want opportunity to display similar proclivities."

"Then society is unjust, and I would have none of it if I were you," retorted the girl, spiritedly.

"Society has saved me the trouble, and will have none of me," replied Dainty, with a faint smile.

This was, as we know, both unjust and untrue. Frank Ellerton's friends had been sincerely sorry for him, and had been even marked in their attentions; but Dainty had viewed all such kindness through a distorted lens, and had rejected their well-meant offices, viewing even the hearty sympathy of his regiment with distrust. Then, again, Jennie knew that she could be of real assistance to him in communicating with his brother; and that, if the at present somewhat undefined idea of Maurice's escape should

ever take definite form, she could be of still greater use to him. Every inch of Portland was familiar to Jenny, and, what was of still greater importance, every nook and cranny of its shores. From the dark rifts and caverns in the neighbourhood of the Bill to the more practicable shingle about Church Cove and the King's Pier, from treacherous Chesil Beach to the peaceful landing-places of Castletown, all were well known to Jennie. This idea, that Maurice should break his bonds, is fermenting rapidly in two heads—heads likely to endeavour to give a practical turn to it, if they can persuade Maurice to fall into their views. In the meanwhile, clearly the first thing to be done is to open communication with him, and discover what he has to say upon the subject.

That idea, however, will have to take possession of a third head before it has the remotest chance of being realized. Maurice is no more capable of devising an escape from the prison than an infant. Clearly, too, his getting without the walls must be of his own doing. Even Jennie, sanguine and full of schemes as she is, when she talks the matter over with Dainty, can suggest no possibility of assisting him till he shall stand outside Portland prison. That first indispensable part of the drama must be conceived and carried out from the *inside*. Is it likely that a man such as Maurice can plot and put in execution so difficult a design? The few that have broken bonds from Portland have been astute, practised criminals, and have in most cases been favoured by circumstances. Still, think the conspirators, we would fain know what he thinks of such a scheme.

Jennie's womanly instinct had not deceived her when she divined that Dainty would probably wish that his presence in the neighbourhood should not be known to Mr. Weaver. Still, but for fortune favouring him, it would have been almost impossible but that he should have run against that officer in the course of his constant visits to Upway. But, as it happened, Mr. Weaver had been summoned suddenly to Ireland, in consequence of the death of his father, and so that impetuous, blundering young Irishman was for the present out of the yaw. It

would be a nice question to decide which of the two was most gratified by this fortuitous circumstance. If Dainty was nervously apprehensive of meeting Mr. Weaver, most assuredly Jennie sometimes thought how dreadfully, poor fellow, he would have been in the way, had he been still at Portland. It was very nice to hear him sing the praises of the man she loved, when that man was far away; but when she could talk to the man himself, Jennie felt she could dispense with the chorus.

It was curious to mark the change that was rapidly stealing over the relations of these two. Only a year ago, and Dainty had indolently and carelessly accepted the girl's only too palpable admiration for himself, constantly finding fault with her, often snubbing her, often smiling at her enthusiasm: laughing at her for her wild, passionate love of the beautiful. For Jennie had a keen eye for the fair pictures of nature's painting, in which that neighbourhood abounds. She would lie on the grass drinking in the panorama of Weymouth Bay, or would stand on the dizzy verge of the West Cliff at Portland with the rain in her hair, and watch the fierce rollers come tumbling into the bay at her feet, while the clouds scudded and gathered fast before the tumultuous, shrieking south-west wind, as, like a petulant child, from soft sobbing and moaning, it screamed itself into a very paroxysm of passion. All these changes were very sweet to Jennie. She loved the ocean as those born by it ever do. She entered into its varied moods—could be lazy and listless as itself when the channel showed scarce a ripple; could exult when the white-crested waves came thundering against the granite cliffs, and Portland's Race was a sheet of foam. Those nursed within "boom of the billow" never forget its lullaby. Dainty, of the *nil admirari* school, perforce of training, although not in the least intended to be such by nature, had often made the girl's cheeks tingle by his satirical comments upon her enthusiasm. She only gave expression to what she honestly felt. But Dainty, accustomed to hear artificial rhapsodies on such points, was wont to be somewhat intolerant concerning them, and mocked such outbursts accord-

ingly. He did not, it is true, know how his idle gibling stung.

But now all this was changed. Imperceptibly it was Jennie who took the lead in their talk; shyly somewhat, perhaps, at first, but gaining strength and confidence every time they met. Dainty never laughed at her outbursts of enthusiasm now; and a deference indescribable, but which no woman ever failed to mark and judge, has crept into his manner regarding her. His lips linger fondly over her name when he pronounces it; his voice softens as he speaks to her. He consults her continually. He is getting into the habit of bringing all his annoyances to her. And Jennie's bright grey eyes shine with a marvellously softened light. There is a bloom on her cheeks, and a leaping of her heart that, verily, she does not quite understand. Even that bibulous, vision-seeing uncle of hers compliments her upon her appearance, and tells her she looks like a rose.

When the light of love glows in a woman's eyes, it is marvellous the change that it makes in her appearance. The plainest woman is transfigured, and, at all events once in her life, approaches to good looks. But when a handsome girl is touched with the enchanter's wand, it is then that you see beauty in its meridian, let men write or sing what they will about such culmination later.

Dainty has received Maurice's note after some delay. It has been forwarded from his regiment, with other letters, to the post-office at Weymouth; having travelled about thus in pursuit of him, because the mysterious agents who conduct that surreptitious Portland underground mail had no other clue to his whereabouts. It does not say much. Maurice, when he wrote it, had not got that little packet which, after such watching and anxiety, he had at last snatched from its concealment. He only says that it is possible to write to him in this manner—that he is heart-broken, hopeless, despairing—that the dull routine and monotony of the prison life are more than he can bear—that to be shut out from all intelligence concerning those near and dear to him, is punishment so severe that he will risk anything sooner than endure it longer. "It is possible for you, Dainty," he pleads, "to alleviate this

in some measure. If ever you loved me, I implore you to let me hear from some of you, once a month, or so. You cannot imagine what only a few lines are to me. A letter, however short—a note, now and then, from you, Rosie, or my mother, too, will be bliss. Deeply as I have sinned—and, God help me, dragged all your names through the mire with my own—yet I have been heavily punished. Not a thing have I to look forward to, midst all the abyss of years that lie before me, but an occasional letter. Do not kill this hope that has but just dawned upon me. It was but a few days ago that I discovered such a possibility existed; and I am indebted for the forwarding of this to one of my more practised brethren in crime. I shudder when I write the words; and yet what better am I than he? Between the forger and the burglar there is little to choose. Still the unhappy wretch who pens these lines is your brother. Dainty, for our old love, and the old days, in the name of that mother whose head I have bowed with shame, but who has so nobly assured me, both of her continued affection and forgiveness, be generous—I ask only a letter!”

Dainty drew a long breath as he finished this epistle. “Thank heaven!” he muttered, “the poor dear old fellow has got that at all events.” And he fell once more to musing over whether it were possible to rescue Maurice from his dreary lot, and then he thought he would go out to Upway and tell Jennie all about it.

He rarely went to the cottage now; he disliked meeting the Captain. The veteran had never taken to him, and formerly had made slight scruples of showing his aversion. But the old mariner had an innate strain of chivalry in his disposition, that forbade him to be hard upon a man who had experienced a fall in the world. Of course he knew the trouble that had come upon Dainty, and, upon the few occasions upon which they had met, nothing could exceed Captain Holdershed’s studied courtesy. But unfortunately that was even more distasteful to Dainty than his former somewhat repellent demeanour. The Captain’s overstrained politeness, well as it was intended, only served to remind him more painfully than ever of the disgrace that had befallen him. It was calculated to do so;

for the Captain thought it right to put on a most lugubrious expression of countenance whenever he chanced to meet Dainty—to go through most ludicrous attempts at modulating his voice, which resulted usually in his speaking in a hoarse whisper, supposed by that gallant officer to be indicative of sympathy and commiseration, and finally to gulp down the sea-songs in which he was accustomed to indulge in a manner peculiarly marked and exasperating to a man like Dainty. The old sailor was unable to control his propensity for Dibdin, but always pulled himself up suddenly, and looked as shocked as if he had been guilty of such indiscretion at a funeral.

Dainty did as he had done many times before—seated himself by the “Wishing Well,” and bid Nance go and fetch Miss Holdershed.

“I’ll do your errand,” said the child, as she slipped the shilling Dainty had given her into her pocket; “for if I don’t, you’ll just walk up and fetch her yourself. But I’d never move a foot to bring you together, if I thought I could keep you apart. You’re her doom—I know it, Mr. Ellerton; I have seen it there,” and Nance pointed solemnly to the deep clear waters. “If you mean her wrong, look to yourself. I am but a girl, but a girl’s hand is strong enough to right a woman’s wrong, if her heart don’t fail her; and mine won’t. Nobody ever was good to me but she, and I’d die for her thrice over, if I could.”

“Nonsense, Nance,” replied Dainty. “I am afraid you don’t like me, though I’ve been kind to you in a way, too. But you must know that I should be the last person in the world to injure Miss Holdershed——”

“If I thought you would willingly,” replied the girl, moving close to his side as he sat carelessly on the low stone parapet, and dropping her voice to a fierce whisper, “I’d stab you where you sit this minute!” And as she spoke, she drew from her pocket one of those spring dagger-knives, and snapped it open before him.

Dainty never moved. For a second the child’s eyes flashed with a fierce light as she looked at him; then closing her knife with a click, she returned it to her pocket and said mournfully, “The Lady has said so; it is written

in the waters. If I could but see 'the good people,' they'd perhaps tell me more." She paused for a few seconds, then exclaimed briefly, "I'll fetch her," and sped away upon her errand.

"That girl could be dangerous," thought Dainty. "I suppose she's a little touched in the head; but there was a gleam in her eyes, for about a minute, that looked as murderous as anything I ever imagined. The little spit-fire! However, she's much mistaken if she thinks Jennie Holdershed will ever come to harm through me. I would sooner cut my right hand off than throw a gloom over her bright face."

And yet he knows that Jennie loves him; that he is teaching her to love him more day by day. How is that love to end? Is he prepared to marry the daughter of a poor Portland farmer? And if not, what but sorrow and sadness can come to Jennie of their constant intercourse. That he is gradually conceiving a deep feeling for her, Dainty is also to some extent aware, although he dissembles much to himself on that point; persuades himself that he is compelled to see her on Maurice's account, and yet he is conscious how often Jennie's graceful image floats across his mind, and mingles with the smoke-wreaths of his solitary pipe.

I doubt whether women quite comprehend how a lonely cigar at times advances their interests. Man is given to much meditation under such circumstances, and when he is in love, who can doubt what form such meditation will take?

But now Jennie, in her sailor hat and close-fitting serge dress, comes tripping gaily down the path, her hair just a little disordered; for those rich brown tresses always are so difficult to keep neat, and defy even Jennie's deft fingers to restrain their exuberance—escaping here and there in spite of binding, knotting, and braiding; and yet, who that saw the girl could have wished it otherwise? There's a glow in her cheeks, and a sparkle in her eyes, as she extends her hands to Dainty and exclaims, "News of some sort, Frank, what is it?"

"I have a letter from Maurice to show you," he replied, as he took her somewhat sunburnt little hands in his.

"I want you to see it." He gazed fondly into her face as he spoke, and the girl's colour rose as she met his glance.

"It is very sad," she said, after reading the note, "to think of one dear to you being so miserable. Poor fellow! Do you think he would risk something for freedom?"

"He must—he shall!" replied Dainty sternly. "I intend to venture everything. But you! it is not right that you should be mixed up in this affair."

"I intend to be, all the same," replied the girl, with a quick little nod of her head. "I claim a right to give such help as I may."

"How so?" he asked gravely.

"Because—because," replied Jennie, blushing, "it is my whim, and—well, is not that reason enough for a woman?"

"It might be for some, but not for you."

"Frank, you try me hardly, unfairly," replied the girl vehemently, as she once more raised her eyes to his. "Is it not enough that I wish to give you what assistance I can?" It was ungenerous, she thought, that he should press so closely. He knew why only too well. Did he wish to put her to the shame of owning her love before he had confessed his own? and Jennie turned from him angrily with burning cheeks, as this idea crossed her mind.

But his hand clasped hers, and in low, passionate tones, he murmured into her ear:

"If I press you hardly, darling, it is because I hope to make you confess that it is for love of me you would do this. Won't you say so, Jennie, dearest?"

She turned towards him quickly, as she replied;

"You know it is, Frank. You know I have loved you from the first. How can you tease me so?"

"I shall never tease you again, my own," returned Dainty, as he clasped her in his arms and kissed her lips. "I hoped I had won you, Jennie, but was not quite sure."

"Oh!" replied the girl, as, with her head resting on his shoulder, she smiled up in his face, "I am afraid you had very little doubt about it. I wish that I had kept my secret better."

"Isn't it better, pet, to have no secret to keep?" retorted Dainty, as he once more kissed her.

"Perhaps so," replied the girl, gaily, as she slipped from his embrace. "If you keep them as I have done, it is best to have none, undoubtedly. But come and sit down, Frank, and let us think over this letter."

So they sat down on the low wall, beneath the shade of the beech and horse chestnut; and the stream rippled, plashed, and gurgled over the stones, in soft, loving, laughing accompaniment to their talk—as sweet a melody as two lovers could wish to hear, in those pauses so incidental to such converse. They, perhaps, talked rather more about themselves than the topic which they had nominally decided to discuss; but that is not much to be wondered at. One thing was clear, they agreed: Dainty must have an answer from Maurice before they could take any further steps. It was necessary to be quite sure that communication with him was thoroughly established.

At last Frank Ellerton rose to depart. The girl clung lovingly to him as she bade him adieu.

"Good-bye, dearest," she murmured. "I shall see you again soon—shall I not?—if it is but to assure me this afternoon has not been all a dream."

"Yes, the day after to-morrow," replied Ellerton laughing. "Do you think, Jennie, I could keep away longer?"

"I don't know," replied the girl; "you contrived to keep away for a year, remember, and I began to think I should never see you again."

"That was because I was a fool, Jennie, and didn't know the prize I'd left behind me."

"And perhaps you won't value it much now you've found it," she replied, half in jest and half in earnest.

"Take care of your lips, sweet; there is but one way to close them when they give utterance to such blasphemy."

And Jennie paid due penalty for her last remark.

"Once more good-bye. May I say it? You won't be angry?"

"No. What is it?"

"Then good-bye, Dainty, dearest," and Jennie fled rapidly in the direction of the cottage.

To call him by that name had long been a strange fancy

of hers, but she had never ventured to do so, although she had called him by his Christian name from their first acquaintance. Still she knew that all his intimate friends, and even his own family, usually called him by this nickname, and many a time had she also to herself. Was it an odd whim of hers? I can't say. But I don't think a woman would deem it so.



CHAPTER XXII.

BLADES MEDITATES CHANGE OF AIR.



JAMES CARNOUL, marched off, handcuffed and raging, after his escapade in the quarries, gives a curious instance of the untameable disposition that characterises men of his stamp—of how impossible it is to reclaim them—of how near akin to the brutes, even in civilized countries, a human being may be found. This man, bear in mind, is not utterly uneducated. You cannot account for his savage temper on the ground of ignorance, on the theory that he has sprung from the gutter, and has grown up untaught, uncared for. Whatever his antecedents may have been, at all events the man can both read and write passably, and use good language when he chooses. One day Carnoul picked up, during his toil in the quarries, a half-fledged bird, and carried it home with him. He begged hard to be allowed to keep it, and, though contrary to rule, his request was acceded to. The governor thought it might soften the tiger heart of this man if he had something to tend, to care for, that depended upon him for its very existence.

Rare, indeed, was the sight of a bird in those fields of grey stone, save the screaming gulls that floated high overhead, and even his fellows took great interest in Carnoul's pet. He watched over it devotedly, succeeded in rearing it, and so tame did it become that it would perch on his head, hand, or shoulder, come to his whistle, and always welcome him with a flutter of its wings, and a

chirrup of delight when he returned from his labours. One would have said this man loved the waif that he had succoured. The poor little foundling undoubtedly did love him, and showed it as far as lay within a mere lark's capabilities.

Before he was taken to "the separates," or punishment cells, Carnoul asked permission to obtain some necessaries from his own cell. The lark in his cage twittered and fluttered in a tumult of joy at the appearance of his master.

"Let me say good-bye to him," said Carnoul, doggedly.

The warders assented. and raising his handcuffed wrists, Carnoul opened the cage. The bird flew out, perched on his shoulder, nestled against his cheek, and chirped its satisfaction. Raising his open hands, Carnoul gave a low whistle, and the lark fluttered down and perched upon them, looking up at him with its bright, bead-like eyes. Another second, then the cruel fingers, closing like a vice, crushed the life out of it, and, with a savage exclamation, Carnoul threw his dead favourite upon the floor.

What can you do with a criminal of this type? The lock, the lash, bread and water, alone keep such men in subjection.

When Maurice Ellerton found himself in his cell, with the bolt once more drawn upon him, he drew forth his prize, and sat for some minutes gazing at it. He turns the little packet over and over in his fingers, as a miser might handle his adored gold. He has so little to look forward to, that this trifling interruption of the hideous monotony of his life is an event that makes him almost tremble with anticipation. His hands shake slightly as he slowly undoes the string; then he unfolds the oil-cloth in which the packet is wrapped, in such deliberate fashion as one has seen an epicure sip a wine of rare vintage. He seeks to prolong his enjoyment. At length he comes to the letter. It is without signature, but he recognises his brother's handwriting at a glance. A smile plays about his mouth as he reads it. Not very much in that letter, either, and somewhat cautiously worded to boot.

But there is such honest sympathy for him breathed in its every line, as makes it very sweet to Maurice. Dainty tells him that to think of his misery is insupportable;

that he has come into the neighbourhood to see if it be not possible to communicate with him oftener, and that he is assured it is so; that he writes this to test the good faith of those who have undertaken to deliver it. Let the writer be but once assured that his note has reached its destination, and Maurice will hear constantly from him by the same channel.

"I write somewhat guardedly this time," says Dainty, "as those to whom I commit it may be more sanguine of success than the result may warrant; and yet they declare that this is certain to reach your hands. Let me only know that it does so, and then, dear Maurice, you shall hear more fully from me.—D." Such was the signature. A postscript informed him that all letters addressed to Thomas Turnbull would be brought to the writer.

Dainty, under Jennie's directions, had spent money freely, though not lavishly, in certain quarters that she had indicated. "Not too much," had urged Jennie, "or you will make them so reckless in the hope of gain, that it will ensure discovery, or their pockets being so well lined will attract attention. Be liberal, but don't exceed what I tell you. That is quite sufficient to enlist all engaged in this work, and they are not very many, in your behalf. They will keep sharp enough look-out for a free hand, never fear."

Most of these hybrid smugglers are now on the *qui-vive* for anything addressed to Thomas Turnbull, and keen and practised eyes scan the quarries nightly, when the moon allows them to do so. At risk of repetition, let me once more point out that these stone-fields are without the prison, and perfectly open to the public; indeed, a foot-path runs through them.

Maurice has read and re-read Dainty's note perhaps a dozen times. How either isolated men or women will re-peruse letters from those they love, when their lot is very different from a prison! In far-away foreign stations, how precious are the loving words of sympathy to the struggling toilers of both sexes, who look forward to the mail as the one sweetener of their lonely arid existence—the one thing that reminds them that there are those who have an interest in their fierce battle with the world—that

there are eyes still which sparkle at their success, that will weep salt tears at their rebuffs! Little wonder that Maurice, with that vista of years staring him in the face, should linger fondly over his brother's letter.

But discipline, whether it be in camp or prison, cannot afford to make allowances for feeling, so Maurice dreamily sweeps up his cell, and pushes his little broom beneath the door. The latter has an aperture at the foot, of some three inches or so, for purposes of ventilation, which allows this; and it is one of the regulations of the place that the prisoners shall do so. A sharp authoritative tap. Maurice answers briefly "Here," withdraws his broom, and is left to his meditations or slumbers.

He throws himself upon his bed, but though generally his day's toil suffices to lock his eye-lids almost immediately, yet to-night he cannot sleep. He is still thinking of Dainty's letter. Yes, he must answer that letter at once. To-morrow he will consult Blades about sending his reply. That worthy can of course manage it. Then he shall hear again shortly. Dainty, he fancies, has something more to tell him than he dared write this time. What can it be? Not much that can benefit him, but it is such a treat to get news of them at all. Maurice tosses restlessly on his narrow pallet, and longs for daylight. Usually his last thought is that the dread summons to rise and dress will greet his ear all too soon. For is there not oblivion of his misery in sleep? To-night it is otherwise, and it is not till towards morning that Nature asserts her ascendancy, that the weariness of the body conquers the unruly mind.

"Want to talk to you," says Maurice, with motionless lips, in an undertone, as they troop out to parade next day, preparatory to being marched off to their respective labours.

"Very good," replied Mr. Blades, with a quiver of his left eye-lid, in a similar tone. "Want a leetle more advice, eh? Got your parcel all right? Anything to share with a chap?"

"There was nothing but a letter."

"Don't think much of your pals, you know. Never mind, we'll have a real jaw on Sunday."

"But I want to send an answer," muttered Maurice.

"Well, write it and give it me, and tell 'em tobacco in the stick comes grateful, and perwents the wind blowing such billet-dows about. Mum—ware hawk!" and Mr. Blades' face became suddenly stricken with stony stupidity.

"No talking there," exclaimed a warder, as he threw a keen eye in their direction; but Mr. Blades' countenance was blanker than any wall.

No further conversation of any moment was achieved between the two during the week; disjointed snatches, such as the above, of course there were. Maurice wrote his letter, and consigned it to his more practical comrade to despatch. This also Bill Blades, in mysterious undertone, informed him had been duly accomplished. That worthy's position in the blacksmith's shop gave him considerable facility in that respect. His work always lay in the same spot, while Maurice could never be quite certain where he would be employed. Had Dainty's letter been intended for, or meant to pass through, the hands of Blades, it would have been hidden in a very different place. It was always uncertain whether a prisoner would be enabled to approach any given heap of stone in the quarries. He might work within sight of it, know it was there, but find it quite unattainable, nevertheless. Round the narrowed range of the blacksmith's shop it was very different. It must go very hard with a practised hand like Blades, if he could not contrive, in the course of the day, to approach the sign he recognised, under some pretext. Maurice would probably never have obtained his letter but for Carnoul's outbreak. The next day, though working in the same vicinity, he never had a chance to get anything like so near that memorable heap of "waste." But when the traffickers in this business once establish satisfactory communication with a prisoner, it becomes comparatively easy. As it was, except for Blades' keen eyesight and a good deal of luck afterwards, that letter had probably never reached Maurice's hands.

But Sunday comes at last—a day for which Maurice has been longing, upon, it is to be feared, most heathenish grounds. At length comes that hour in which unrestrained

talk is allowed—only sixty minutes, and he has so much to say! To his intense relief Mr. Blades joins him at once, and plunges in *medias res*, without circumlocution

"You see," says that ingenious gentleman, "time is limited. The authorities at Portland have no idea of our talking about nothing, like so many members of Parliament. It'd do a few of them good—a turn here. If they'd a week to think out all they had to say, and just sixty minutes to say it in, they'd be better worth hearing. They'd have to leave out their coughs and hems and stammering, and a good deal of the froth of it; and froth in a speech ain't quite the point it is in a pot of porter. There's mostly nothing below it."

It occurred to Maurice that his companion, like some of the orators he was ridiculing, showed signs of airing his own rhetoric—of seeking simply to convince his auditor of his own cleverness, instead of endeavouring to throw light upon the subject of discussion. It has been before remarked that Mr. Blades was possessed of inordinate vanity. His two special weaknesses were his abilities in his "profession" and his talent for speechifying. He had been a prominent member of a Judge and Jury club before his committal, and had distinguished himself at his trial by some rather humorous cross-examination of the witnesses. Not, as may be supposed, in the least to the point, but his impudent questions had occasioned some laughter—almost as satisfactory to the man, at the time, as if he had completely broken down the evidence against him. It was in the grain of him, and he could no more resist an opportunity to astonish any one with the glibness of his tongue, than a cat can resist cream, a hypochondriac the narration of his ailments, or an undergraduate wearing a blue necktie in the latter part of March.

"Do you think I shall hear again soon?" asked Maurice.

"Of course you will," replied his companion. "The thing will be in my hands next time, and there will be nothing like as much difficulty about getting hold of it then. They know me outside, and are quite aware Bill Blades is top of his profession. Tell you I found last week what's a knife now. If I happen to drop on to anything else as useful, blessed if I shall be able to keep **my**

hands quiet. I shall go out of this plaguy old building, if it's only to come back again. I shan't be able to resist the temptation. Think of 'Escape of Bill Blades, the Notorious Burglar,' in all the papers. How the swells here would stare if they found my cell empty one morning, and I shouldn't want much to take me outside. There! never mind what I'm saying. It's only chaff. What'd be the use of it? I should like to astonish these Portland people, too," continued Mr. Blades, meditatively. "They don't quite believe in my talents."

Though Maurice listened attentively to all his companion said, he looked upon it as mere braggadocio. Already had he fathomed the extreme vanity of the man's character. Nevertheless he still believed that Blades could forward letters to the outside. True, this had not been as yet tested, for Dainty's note was manifestly no reply to his own, and it was not till he obtained an answer to that he could be assured on this point. Yet Maurice did remember Mr. Blades' trial, and the extraordinary lock and bar breaking powers that *had* been then only too clearly proved against him.

However, all this mattered little to Maurice. No idea of escape from his bonds had as yet entered his head. He craved only to hear from his kith. But the hour of license draws to a close, and calls forth no regret on Maurice's part, for Mr. Blades is now launched upon a stream of self-glorification which there is no stemming, and relates feat after feat of his own performing, which, although they testify to his abilities with regard to obtaining the goods his fellow-men deemed so securely stored, are most corroborative evidence that his detention in Portland is beneficial to the public.

"Time's up," he says, stopping abruptly in his harangue, and casting a quick, keen look into his companion's face. "You think what I've been telling you's all bounce. Very well. You ain't likely to be leaving just yet," and Mr. Blades cast an ironical glance at Maurice's terrible badge. "Perhaps you'll acknowledge, some fine morning, that Bill Blades had the key of the lock after all; that he only stayed here because his constitution required it. It's a fine air, very, but I shall perhaps find it just a leetle too

keen as the winter draws on ; and if so, my dear friends, much as it will grieve me to leave you all, my duty to myself will require me to seek repose in other climes. Bless you—here comes the warder! Adoo, and don't forget that baccy in the stick is grateful."

Not very much in this conversation, and yet it showed that Mr. Blades' restless vanity was fermenting. Had the man been sentenced to be hanged, he would have experienced much relief from the newspaper comments on his forthcoming execution ; and that such should be conducted, as under the present law, privately within the gaol, would have been, indeed, a bitter drop in his last draught of existence.

But that idea of an escape has now entered that third head, into which it is so essential it should, before anything can come of it. Mr. Blades' vanity may compass inside the prison what Dainty and Jennie are so anxious to facilitate outside—Maurice's escape.





CHAPTER XXIII.

KISSES AND COUNSEL.

DAINTY, when he got back to Weymouth, mused a good deal over that scene he had taken part in at "the Wishing Well." True, he had been pretty confident that Jennie's heart was his, for some time past, but it had been very sweet to hear her confess it—to see her cheeks glow, and her large grey eyes swim, as, abandoning all restraint, he poured forth the story of his passion into her ear. And the girl was frankness itself. She made no mock-modest pretence, but owned she was his, freely and honestly; that he had possessed her love from the first. "But time was, Frank," she whispered, "I thought you would never care to ask for it. Ah! how happy you have made me!"

He pondered over these words with softened face—and Dainty's face had worn a hard, defiant expression of late. They had been very sweet to listen to at the time, they were very sweet to think over now. To this man at war with the world—at war, I grant you, chiefly on account of his own morbid feeling regarding his brother's disgrace—there was something inexpressibly touching in the great love that he had won. And still he muses dreamily, "How is this to end?" He has never harboured evil thought concerning Jennie. He does not now. But can he marry her—a girl so much beneath his own station? He should have asked himself that question before he permitted his lips to say what they have uttered this day. And yet he thinks, "Why should I not? Where again shall I find such a love as this? What am I?—a broken

man. If I wished to wed in my own class, what girl would have the courage to say 'Yes' to the forger's brother? Bah!" and his lip curled, "I have done with society. Why should I not marry her? The world I have hitherto lived in and I are henceforth strangers. Jennie knows my story, and it has but strengthened her affection. We will tread life's path together. How blind I was never to see how handsome she is, before! Tim Weaver's eyes are better than mine, that's certain." And Dainty gave vent to a low laugh, as he pictured to himself what wild work Jennie must have made with his impressible friend's heart.

The more Dainty turned all this over in his mind, the more he became confirmed in another idea that had for some weeks been floating in his brain; and that was, to leave the army. As he sat there, musing over all these things, gradually he shapes out a future for himself; and when, throwing the end of the cigar into the grate, he rises to seek his bed, Dainty has determined to sell his commission—to rescue Maurice, if possible; but, above all, to marry Jennie before Christmas.

Man has often much difficulty about making up his mind; and when he has done so, the fates make mockery of his resolutions. As we get on in life, and look back upon our boyhood's dreams, how few of us have realized them! We have never nearly achieved what we then thought. Many of us are not even in the groove we marked out for ourselves. We meant to be soldiers, and we find ourselves priests. We raved of "the ever free, the glorious sea," gloated over Marryat's novels, bewildered our feminine relations with talk about spankers and cutwaters, and here we are, steady-going city men! Eminent barristers we have pictured ourselves, and find ourselves writers of burlesques. Whilst others there are, all hope of fame and ambition long since buried, who earn their scanty bread and cheese in dark, recondite fashion, that they would scarcely care to dwell upon. Men who started high of heart, and with boundless aspirations, but who now, with the life well-nigh crushed out of them, are content if they can earn a bare subsistence. The golden dreams of our youth, how they shiver! The golden dream of our

love.—it is well for us when that, also, lies not shattered in the dust!

Dainty, when he rises next morning, feels more his old self than he has since that terrible day when Maurice first confessed to him his crime. At last his path is clear. He knows now what he has to do; he has made up his mind. He came to Weymouth dispirited, listless, almost purposeless—possessed with nothing but a vague idea of communicating with his brother. Now his pulses beat fiercely in response to a woman's love. No puling love, either, is it that he has won, but that of a wild, passionate heart, that will cling to him in stormy days even closer than in sunshiny weather—one that, though it could swell with exultation at his success in life, would nestle to him even more fondly in misery and disappointment. A woman who, far from staying his hand, urges him to try for Maurice's freedom, and is willing to risk, like himself, her liberty in the attempt; one who will aid him and abet him, to the full extent of her capabilities, in whatever he would fain do.

Dainty knows this; he feels that this girl, in her passionate devotion, would sacrifice herself without a murmur, let him but lift a finger—that she would dare everything at a mere word from him. He loves her honestly and truly. Has he the right to mix her up in so dangerous a game as he is bent on playing?—for assisting the escape of a prisoner from Portland carries pains and penalties that would undoubtedly be enforced in case of detection.

He muses on this as he dresses. He will talk it over with her, he thinks; but nevertheless he does not feel much compunction about availing himself of her assistance. "We will risk this together," he mutters. "I shall be cruelly tied without her aid. Nance and all these people will work for me at Jennie's nod. They dare not play her false. But gold lavished by my hand would not ensure their fidelity. That imp Nance always looks askew at me, and but for Jennie's influence, I'm sure, would refuse to give me the slightest assistance. I will point out to Jennie the risk she runs herself. My God! what a humbug I am!—as if she does not know that more thoroughly than I do!—as if aught that I could say

would turn her from standing by me in this thing ! But I will see her to-day, at all events."

How easy to find a pretext for seeing the woman we love ! Dainty made his way out to Upway, and contrary to his usual practice, went straight to the cottage. There he was unfortunate enough to find not only Jennie out, but the Captain at home. That bibulous veteran received him with the most stately and elaborate courtesy. In the chivalry of his nature, Captain Holdershed felt it incumbent upon him to display unwonted politeness and hospitality to a man upon whom the world looked coldly—to one who, however unjustly, lay in some sort under the stigma of crime.

The Captain, in this phase, was a sight to see. In his studious endeavours to say nothing that could possibly wound the feelings of his guest, he was perpetually gulping down common-place observations that, to his bewildered mind, seemed, when half-uttered, to contain what might be deemed a painful allusion—a thing of itself inexpressibly irritating, as might be well supposed, to Dainty. The Captain considered that it was proper to assume an aspect of chastened woe upon the occasion, and had to struggle with an inclination to Dibdin's minstrelsy that gave him much trouble. Then again the proffer of something to drink was so essentially part of the Captain's views of hospitality that this also was matter of much tribulation to him. Aware that Dainty was of a temperate disposition (milk-sop I fear the gallant mariner would have termed it), he was unable to make up his mind in what form that hospitality should be displayed. Port wine, he thought, was essentially of a mourning character, both in colour and supporting qualities ; but then he possessed none. At last, after much fidgeting in his seat, considerable stifling of "A can of good stuff had they twigged it,"—a very pet ballad of the veteran's, he suggested a glass of sherry to his guest, to which, in sheer desperation, Dainty consented.

Immense was the relief to the Captain's mind. He bustled about and produced not only a decanter for Dainty's benefit, but a black bottle containing something more congenial to his own tastes.

"Help yourself, Mr. Ellerton," observed the Captain, having solaced himself with a gulp of most portentously coloured brandy-and-water. "I recollect when I was anchored at Table Bay once, my first officer got into a scrimmage, and was locked up by the police——" Here the Captain, suddenly becoming conscious that he was treading on forbidden ground, stopped short, buried his face in his tumbler, then concluded vaguely, "and——and came back with some fresh vegetables in the morning."

Even Dainty, though half-annoyed, could scarce refrain from smiling.

"I see you've got a new bird since I was here last," he remarked, pointing to a bullfinch's cage in the window. "A pet of Miss Jennie's, I suppose?"

"Yes, he's a new 'un—such a one to pipe!" replied the Captain, enthusiastically. "Sings Dibdin through every morning! Blessed if he don't!" But he's not satisfied, somehow. He don't like confinement. He's always trying to break his cage. I mean," continued the veteran, apologetically, "he don't—that is, he doesn't, you know—that is, he's not quite used to it yet." And the veteran quite perspired, in his overwrought delicacy, at the thought that such an allusion might be unpalatable to his guest.

But the more the Captain strove to avoid all topics connected with captivity, so much the more did such subjects float through his perturbed brain. At last, emboldened by brandy-and-water, he conceived the idea of pouring some comfort into Dainty.

"You mustn't be cast down, Mr. Ellerton," he observed. "'While there is life there is hope'—hope, you see. You needn't despair—you understand. They get out sometimes. There was Jack Sheppard, for instance, you know——"

But here the veteran pulled up dead short and covered with confusion, as it flashed across him that, despite of that hero's prison-breaking feats, the gallows had been his ultimate destiny.

To Dainty the position was becoming insupportable, when the door of the parlour opened, and Jennie stood be-

fore them. She paused for a second at the threshold, then with a smile on her lips, and with love-lit eyes walked forward and extended her hand to Ellerton.

"Welcome, Frank," she said; "I thought I should see you to-day, but fancied I should come across you outside. It is too bright an afternoon to spend in the house. You, too, uncle, I fancied were out."

"I'm afraid I am the cause of the Captain's detention," said Dainty. "I called, you see, and caught him at home. He has been sacrificing his love for fresh air to his sense of politeness."

"Well, sir," laughed the girl, "I can't. If you would talk with me you must come outside."

Dainty shook hands with his host, and then followed his mistress down the little garden. The Captain looked after them with a somewhat troubled expression of countenance.

"Damme," he muttered, drawing a long breath, "what's she mean by calling him Frank? I am a muddled old idiot, and ought to have seen to this before. These sparks, when they come fluttering round a handsome girl like Jennie, don't always intend fair sailing. That fellow, with his soft voice and jessamy looks, maybe means to make a fool of my darling. I daresay he thinks an old hunk like me, who is always taking just one more tot of grog than's perhaps good for him, has no eyes," and here the veteran indulged in a wink of supernatural sagacity. "Perhaps he don't think I love that niece ef mine, just because we tiff a bit at times. By the Lord, sir!" soliloquized the Captain, bringing his fist down on the table with a tremendous thump, "if he thinks that Bob Holdershed, though he's laid on the shelf, wouldn't smash his telescope, though there never was such a glass, on the man's head who attempted foul play to Jennie, he'll find himself most blank, blank, etc., mistaken."

The Captain was most sincerely attached to his niece. It was no idle boasting this on his part. Most assuredly would he resent any injury or insult to Jennie, fiercely and promptly—and by his own right hand to boot, for the veteran had small opinion of law courts or legal redress. He was deeply imbued with the spirit of his favourite

minstrel—had strong ideas concerning righting his own wrongs with his own hand, and but that, luckily for himself, he had no grievance to avenge, would have led a troublous life of it with the local magistrates.

But the notion that Jennie is in danger from Dainty's attentions has now taken root in his mind, and he is of that stamp that it is very difficult to disabuse of an idea once established in their brain. The Captain conceives it behoves him to keep an eye upon his niece in future. A piece of supervision upon his part likely to interfere considerably with her and Dainty's schemes regarding Maurice, as it is quite possible that the well-intentioned veteran may discover reason to interpose at some critical moment, upon most erroneous foundation.

"I have been thinking," said Dainty, as they strolled along the bank of the stream that they had so often fished in company, "that I ought not to mix you up in this business of Maurice's."

"Oh!" exclaimed the girl, with an impatient shrug of her shoulders.

"You see," he continued, "I may come to grief over it, and it would make me very miserable if I brought harm to you besides. I shall run the risk of imprisonment if detected, and you, of course, the same."

She made no reply, but walked quietly on by his side.

"Therefore, although, of course, I shall have to come to you for advice, it would be better, perhaps——"

"That you should talk no more nonsense," interposed Jennie, brusquely. "Listen to me." And as she spoke she stopped and turned towards him. "You asked me yesterday for my love. How proudly I gave it you perhaps you hardly understood, though, shame on me, it had been yours these months past. Dainty, dearest," she continued, with softened voice, and clasping her hands pleadingly on his arm, "I claim it henceforth as my right to be by your side in danger or in sorrow; to share your troubles, to do my best to comfort and help you in them. When a woman loves, it is her prerogative. She can exult even in suffering for the man who holds her heart. You won't refuse my aid now, Dainty, will you?"

He drew her fondly to him and kissed her.

"No, my darling," he whispered. "It shall be as you will."

She nestled still closer in his embrace for a few seconds; then, raising her head from her shoulder, looked archly up into his face, and murmured:

"Then, if a scrape comes of it, we shall be both in it."

"Yes, pet," he replied, laughing; "but we'll hope for better luck. It would be a terrible mistake, in trying to help one person out of prison, to put two in, wouldn't it?"

"Yes. Kiss me once more, Dainty, and then we will talk business."

As Jennie Holdershed withdrew from her lover's embrace, she became conscious that a pair of big black eyes had been stedfastly regarding her recent proceedings. Their walk had led them to that willow-clothed little promontory that had been the scene of Jennie's first meeting with Mr. Weaver. Seated just within the fringe of the trees was Nance.

Lovers are usually somewhat disconcerted at the discovery of an unexpected witness of their caresses. It was, therefore, with somewhat heightened colour, and in angry tones, that Jennie inquired what she was doing there.

"Looking at you," replied Nance, stolidly.

"You don't mean to say you have come here for the purpose of watching me?" said Jennie, sharply.

"No," returned Nance, mournfully; "I was here by chance; but I saw you in his arms, just as I have seen you often in the well. Oh! Miss Jennie, Miss Jennie," cried the child, passionately, "no good can come of it! He'll bring harm to you, I know he will!"

"Why, Nance, you foolish girl," interposed Dainty, quickly, "I love her dearer than my life! It's not very likely that I should harm her."

Jennie's grey eyes flashed a grateful acknowledgment of her lover's speech, as she said:

"You dream, Nance."

"Yes, this dream very often; and has not 'the Lady' shown it me besides? He may love you, but he'll be your death all the same!"

"Go home, you little croaker!" laughed Dainty, as he dropped a shilling into her lap. "You'll dance at our wedding yet!"

But the child only shook her head mutely as she rose and walked swiftly away in the direction of her home. Her evil prognostications infected Dainty, and he became somewhat silent and distrait. In vain Jennie rallied him about the absurdity of paying any attention to the whimsical fancies of a half-witted girl; though Nance was not that either—she had her monomania concerning the Lady of the Wishing Well, but she was shrewd enough on other subjects.

Dainty even smiled himself at his own folly, but admitted that he could not put away the idea that it was a bad augury for his enterprise.

"I wonder, Jennie, that you are not dismayed at her prophecy," he exclaimed at last.

"I!" cried the girl, laughing. "It would take a good deal to dismay me this afternoon. I am too happy. Besides, think what she has promised should her prediction be accomplished. If I am to die, it is clasped in your arms, Dainty. I think, dearest, I could meet death thus without much terror. To leave this world with your kiss warm upon my cheek would be to spare me half the anguish of the separation."

She was almost idolatrous in her love; but do you suppose that Dainty thought so? He bent his lips to hers in answer, and whispered:

"Better to live, my darling; but should Nance's ill-omened prophecy prove true, may we die together!"





CHAPTER XXIV.

A BID FOR LIBERTY.

PORTLAND PRISON has been considerably scandalized this last week—*i.e.*, the ruling powers therein, albeit they can hardly help laughing. That terrible malignant, James Carnoul, is the cause.

It may be remembered that, after his escapade in the quarries, Carnoul had been condemned to the "separates," or punishment cells. Here, according to custom, he was visited by the governor. Carnoul, crouching on the floor of his place of confinement, like a wild beast in its lair, received that dignitary's visit with sullen apathy, taking no notice. The warders were shocked at this breach of discipline and decorum, and indignantly explained to Carnoul that etiquette required him to receive the governor's visits standing. He growled inaudibly in response, and the next time the cell was opened for the governor's inspection, Carnoul stood—but on his head. This was more insulting than ever. Three warders promptly reduced him once more to a horizontal position, and wrathfully demanded what he meant by his impudence. But the incorrigible Carnoul only replied that "they had told him to stand; but nobody had said anything about *which end he was to stand on.*"

Such stories permeate through a prison in manner inexplicable, and no one enjoyed the joke more thoroughly than Bill Blades. The worthy, indeed, felt quite a pang of jealousy shoot through his breast. To a man of his

vanity there was something irritating in the idea that any one should become the hero of the community in which he dwelt, but himself. Mr. Blades ruminates over this subject more than is good for him. He feels that he, too, must do something that shall startle Portland generally. A savage outbreak of Carnoul's usual kind is foreign to his disposition, nor do such outbreaks command his admiration. But the audacious humour of Carnoul's last feat has tickled him much. It was a bit of cynical foolery after his own heart.

The more he muses over these things, the more it occurs to Bill Blades that it really is incumbent on him to show Portland what a farce their bolts and bars are when attacked by a first-class artist.

"They really believe," he soliloquizes, "that these gimcrack arrangements would hold me, if I had made up my mind to go. I do think—yes, I actually do think that I shall have to show them how very easy Portland is to get out of. If I happen to come across two or three more essentials, I really must have a turn outside, if it's only for a few days."

There are people in this world born under a lucky star. No sooner do they begin to puzzle how to compass what they wish—to sigh because it seems unattainable, then lo! it is thrown at their feet. Girls despairing of the achievement of some country ball they have set their heart upon, suddenly get an invitation, and *carte blanche* for a dress, to boot. I know one philosopher of this kind whom I have often heard say, "I have no clothes, no money, and no billet, but you will see I shall be there,"—and she usually is. There are men who seldom see their way into grouse-shooting till the last week in July, but they find their way to capital moors all the same.

Mr. Blades was pursuing his accustomed vocations in the blacksmith's shop, a couple of days after he had given way to the above reflections, when one of the carpenters from the adjourning establishment brought in a lot of tools to be ground, reset, and repaired. As he handed them over to the warder in charge there dropped, unnoticed by either of them, a gimlet. This fell close to a small heap of *débris* and ashes that lay close by the forge at

which Blades was at work. He saw it fall, and, moving sharply round to that side, with a slight movement of his foot kicked it among the ashes. The carpenter, having discharged himself of his mission, duly departed. Blades continued his work till he saw his opportunity, when he stooped down, seized his prize, and concealed it in the garter strap of his knickerbockers.

Very elate was that worthy when he regained his cell in the evening with his booty undiscovered by the warders. Cautiously did he remove a small splinter from the flooring of his cell, beneath which he kept his treasures—the memorable piece of steel, now fitted with a rough wooden handle, and metamorphosed into a knife keen as a razor, a couple of large nails, and some half-dozen yards of marline.

“Ha!” he said, “I could do it, I think, with that, but I should like a chisel and an iron hook, to make a certainty of it. The gimlet wants a bit doing to, besides.” Then Mr. Blades carefully fitted the splinter in again and brushed the dust over it, not being satisfied with that performance for some minutes. Brushing it off again, indeed, more than once, and having recourse to a small piece of bees-wax that he had in his pocket, before it quite pleased his critical eye.

“That looks blind enough, I think,” he said at last. “Now, if any one would make it worth my while, I’d have a shy for liberty before many weeks were over. I suppose I’m bound to try it, anyhow. With all those tools, it’d be sinful not to show these duffers what a sham their prison is. There really won’t be a deal of credit in breaking out of a place like this. But it don’t seem quite business like there being no swag to be got out of the transaction. I should like to do the Governor’s house afterwards. But it’d be too venturesome—or else to leave Portland with the Governor’s plate; my eyes, that’d be something to talk about!”

Mr. Blades, in his excessive vanity, a little underrates the difficulties of escaping from the prison, as he may chance to find, should his inordinate self-esteem impel him to try that experiment.

Maurice, meanwhile, is receiving constant letters from

Dainty. A little irregularly, it may be ; but still they do reach him through Blades, now every few days. That illustrious burglar, subsidized by continual sticks of tobacco, takes great interest in furthering this correspondence. Some scheming against the authorities is so congenial to his nature that it would have gone against his grain not to assist in it under any circumstances. But when it kept him so bountifully supplied with caven-dish, of course he entered into it heart and soul. Dainty's letters have of late gradually dwelt upon the possibility of his brother's escape. He has pointed out that can Maurice once get outside the prison, there will be plenty of help awaiting him. In his last letter, he encloses a small but very accurate plan of the island, and tells him that minute instructions for his guidance will be sent him, whenever he can see his way to avail himself of them. Maurice, sick at heart at the dread monotony of his life, turns the idea slowly over in his mind, till at last there awakens a feverish longing within him to at all events attempt freedom.

But no sooner has he arrived at this conclusion, than Maurice becomes painfully aware of how powerless he is to help himself. To him the bolts and bars of Portland seem insuperable. What is the use of promise of assistance on the outside, when you feel that the getting outside is impossible? To achieve this of himself, Maurice knows to be hopeless. He must have help from within the walls. His mind naturally reverts to his neighbour. He recalls the contemptuous way in which Mr. Blades has spoken of the precautions taken for his security—of how he boasted that he could leave the prison fast enough, if he thought it would conduce to his benefit in any way. Clearly he must have a talk with Mr. Blades the first opportunity, and for a lengthened conference of this nature it was inevitable that he must await the Sunday.

He contrived, in the course of the week, to let that worthy know he had something important to say to him ; so that no sooner were they turned loose for the customary hour of license on the ensuing Sabbath than Blades at once joined him.

"I've had a find this week, mate," said the burglar

with a wink. "Not a very big thing, nor yet a very valuable thing, but if they happen to leave one or two more such about in my way, I'm blessed if I shan't have to make use of 'em. My fingers are always itching to see what I can do with tools when I get hold of 'em."

"What did you find?" asked Maurice, with some curiosity.

"Nothing you'd think of much account—wouldn't know how to use it when you got it—which it were a gimlet," replied Blades facetiously.

Maurice certainly did not consider that any great acquisition, and his look said as much.

"No, I didn't suppose you'd think a deal of it," continued Blades, answering the unspoken comment visible on his companion's face, "But you'll maybe think more of it a few weeks hence. Now, what's the matter? Out with it quick, for time here is limited as regards talking and eating; though when it comes to work, they're liberal—oh! very—perhaps just a trifle too much so. They've calculated to about forty seconds what's the utmost to be got out of you on the rations as they stand. Ugh! the skinflints!"

"Well," replied Maurice. "I want to get out."

"Singular that, very," observed Mr. Blades, meditatively. "There's fifteen hundred or so here suffering from that identical complaint. I'm quite surprised at your catching it!"

"Don't talk nonsense—you know what I mean. I want to try my hand at an escape."

"Try away, by all means, and if it comes off, I'll cheer, if I get seven days in 'the separates' for it. But you're clean mad. You!—why, you wouldn't have a ghost of a chance."

"I know that," returned Maurice—"not alone; but you're going with me."

"Well, you swells are cool, I've been told," replied the burglar, gazing at his companion in blank astonishment, "but blest if ever I heard the likes o' that!"

"Why," urged Maurice, "you are always bragging that you can go out of this place when you like. Why should you refuse to take me with you?"

"O Lord!" cried Mr. Blades, "hold me, somebody! I'd faint dead, only the barbarians here bring you round with cold water instead of brandy, as is the way amongst civilized people."

"Confound your foolery!" exclaimed Maurice, angrily. "What do you mean!"

"Don't talk so loud," interposed Blades quickly. "I mean this, that, whatever I might think fit to do, I shouldn't burden myself with a greenhorn like you in the business."

"You'd be well paid for it," retorted Maurice, sullenly.

"Hum!" said Blades, "that's another thing. Why couldn't you say so before?"

"Because I didn't think of it."

"I shall go off in hystrikes—I know I shall. I've heard—beg pardon—you were a man of business once."

Maurice nodded assent.

"Well, you came to trouble. It ain't much to be wondered at. Didn't you ever find out, when you wanted anything, that the easiest way was to ask whoever had got it to sell what he wanted for it? It would have saved a deal of time in the present instance."

"Go on," said Maurice quietly.

"Exactly," said Mr. Blades, who was never tired of hearing his own voice. "You want to slope from Portland—that's what's the matter with you. Well, you can't do it on your own hook no more nor a babby. 'Now,' says you, or, rather, ought to have said, 'Bill, my philanthropic pippin, what's your figger for restoring an innocent to his family?'"

"What will I guarantee you?" said Maurice, interrogatively.

"Now, really," said Mr. Blades, deprecatingly, and shaking his head, "this ain't business, you know. What's the use of your guaranteeing inside this precious old combination of stone, bars, and timber?"

"Tell me what you mean, then," said Maurice, impatiently.

"Pity you ain't got a quicker head for business," replied the burglar. "Just you sum up what you are going to lodge in the hands of a pal of mine at the 'Cock and Compasses,' Charles Street, Drury Lane, before I move a

finger. I feel pretty ripe for a burst out myself, and I've got together most of the tackle needful; but I ain't ready yet, and shan't be, probably, for another fortnight. If you make it worth my while, we'll go."

"What will make it worth your while?" asked Maurice. "I fancy anything within reason I can promise you."

"Let me think it over a bit." And the two paced round and round in silence.

"Listen, now," said Blades, at last. "Remember, I shall run a heavy risk in trying to take a greenhorn like you out with me. All the work will have to be done by me, because I reckon holding the candle will be about as much as you're good for—of course we must go by night. You're grit, and won't flinch?" he exclaimed, suddenly, staring his companion straight in the face.

"Try me," replied Maurice, simply, and his blue eyes met those of Mr. Blades undauntedly.

"You'll do," replied the latter. "I don't often make a mistake about a fellow. You may be clumsy, but you won't funk. Now," he continued, "I'll have two hundred lodged in London before I start, and know it is there. And you shall sign a promissory note to pay two hundred more within a month, if you get clean off. Will that do?"

Maurice laughed.

"What are you grinning at?" inquired Blades, testily. "Is it too much? This child don't do it cheaper, that's all."

"No, I am laughing at you," retorted Maurice. "You count yourself a man of business. What do you suppose a convict's promissory note would be worth?"

"Well, I mean some of your folks shall sign it," replied the burglar, somewhat chapfallen at his egregious mistake.

"I can't of course promise you anything till I have communicated with my friends," said Maurice. "What you want is two hundred down, and two more within a month, if I accomplish my escape."

Blades nodded.

"Very well. You say you are not ready yet. Continue your preparations, and think how you mean to proceed when everything is ripe. In the meanwhile I will see if the money can be found."

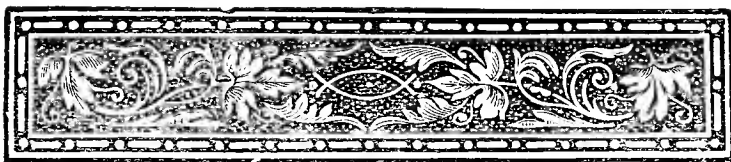
"Look here," replied the burglar, "you speak like a gentleman. You've made no haggling about the price, and I've put it up pretty stiff. If we deal, and do go, I'll play on the square with you. I'll not cramp your chance by hampering you with me. There's my hand."

And the two clasped hands.

If Mr. Blades' last speech sounds a little magniloquent, we must not do that astute gentleman injustice. He certainly meant to behave honestly to Maurice. He justly surmised that amateur help would be at his disposal as soon as he was outside the prison, but of amateur assistance Mr. Blades had the most supreme contempt. He judged, in the few minutes that he had for reflection, the sooner he should disembarrass himself of his companion the better would be his own chance of escape. And with an assurance of two hundred pounds awaiting him in London, Mr. Blades felt that recapture would be bitter indeed. True, he was aware that no one as yet had ever got clear away from Portland; but then, he argued, no one of his capabilities had ever tried. Mere bunglers, all these predecessors of his, he thought. A very different affair from the celebrated Bill Blades making such an attempt. As for that second two hundred, well, he never expected to see any of that, but it was just as well to put it in the bond.

Had he dreamt what help Maurice was to receive from the outside, and by what skilled hands it would be conducted, he would probably have made it *a sine qua non* that he should share his fortunes.

NOTE.—Since this story was penned, I have been informed that a prisoner did actually succeed in making good his escape from Portland. He was of an orderly turn of mind, and returned his convict garb, carefully done up in brown paper, to the Governor, about a year afterwards, with an intimation that he had no further use for it.



CHAPTER XXV.

THE MAID OF THE MIST.

THE plot thickens ; we are nearing the *dénouement* of the drama. Dainty has formally requested permission to retire from the army. To a kindly letter from his Colonel begging him to think over it again, he has replied, briefly but courteously, that his mind was thoroughly made up—that much as he regretted leaving the old corps, yet circumstances were imperative.

“It must be, then, as you wish,” wrote his chief in reply. “You know well, Ellerton, how sorry we shall all be to lose you. If I thought it was a money difficulty, I’d say have a talk with me, at all events, before you decide, but I feel that it is otherwise. I suppose I shall best further your views by sending on your papers to the Horse Guards at once, and will do so. Anyhow, you will come down to say good-bye, and shake hands with us before you are gazetted out. We shall feel hurt if you don’t manage to do that.”

It cost Dainty a pang to answer this letter. It was so like the frank, cheery old soldier who penned it, with whom Dainty had always been a special favourite from the day he joined, a beardless boy. But his answer was decided, nevertheless, and he begged the Colonel to put his horses up for sale, to boot.

Most men feel a pang about leaving their old regiment. It is a wrench to say adieu to those with whom you have been living for years past on the footing of a brother in that

intimate *camaraderie* that I verily believe is unknown out of the twin professions; to think that you will never muster under the old colours more, that the sentry at the gate has saluted you for the last time. I have seen the tears stand in a man's eyes at his farewell dinner, and heard his voice shake, as he thanked his old comrades for drinking his health. Puling sentiment was it? Well, I don't know; he'd been five and twenty years in the corps, and I suppose had contrived to keep a heart somewhere, although he had been hardly so successful about his hair. If it were a thing to laugh at, I can only say there was little indication of that feeling visible in the faces of even the youngest of those that had met to bid him "God speed;" and "poor old buffer, he's awfully cut up," was the harshest commentary that met my ears upon that occasion.

Maurice's letters show that he is now thoroughly possessed with the idea of escape, though, as to when he may see his way into compassing it, he is still utterly vague and indefinite. But Dainty considers that it is high time he made all his preparations for assistance, in the hope that his brother will ere long find himself without Portland prison; he is well aware that help then must be prompt if it is to be of use. Dainty has some small difficulty, at the close of the yachting season, in hiring a smart hundred and twenty ton schooner. More fully manned than usual for her size is this vessel of Dainty's, and very eccentric is her master in the use he makes of her; weighing anchor and starting upon desultory cruises at all hours of the day and night; enthusiastic upon sea fishing, and strangely persistent upon trying the West Bay in pursuance of that division. The boatmen about the pier are at first much astonished at the vagaries of the Maid of the Mist. She is always appearing and disappearing at most abnormal hours. She lies motionless at her anchorage, just inside the harbour at sunset, not a sign of life hardly on board of her; the next morning she is gone. Has been seen off the Bill, or rumour comes that she is hove-to in the West Bay. While at other times the rising sun discovers her unexpectedly lying once more, again in her old berth, having come in silently and mysteriously during the night

The skipper is a taciturn man, from whom little is to be gleaned, while their crew describe their owner as eccentric—"a chap who never seems to know where he wants to go, or when he wants to go there." But that he is a liberal master, all agree; strict only on one point—to wit: that they must be all ready to weigh anchor whenever the whim seizes him. "It ain't a liberty craft, and that's a fact," said one of them; "but we are well paid and found, to make up for it."

So, after a little, the Maid of the Mist flits in and out of Weymouth Harbour without exciting much comment. But the year draws rapidly to a close. Yachts have folded their butterfly wings and returned to that chrysalis state in which such pleasure-craft pass the stormy days of winter and spring. Still does the owner of the Maid keep his flag flying, and constantly put out to buffet with the now often angry channel. She is a rare sea-boat, and makes light of bad weather. "He's a queer customer—our master," mutter the crew; "blessed if the worse it is, the better he don't seem to like it!" And they might well say so, for Dainty has had his schooner out in some of the fierce October gales now blowing, which ordinary yachtsmen would have carefully eschewed. But then Dainty is not yachting for pleasure.

He asked the Captain upon one of these occasions whether he dared go through "the Race," or try to run inside of it.

"God forbid!" answered that taciturn mariner, curtly. "She's a real good boat, and will do all one can honestly ask her; but we'd be swamped in the Race to-day, and go to splinters on the Bill, if we tried to run inside."

"Make for the West Bay, then, in your own way," replied Dainty.

Very seldom did Mark Redman, the skipper, venture to question his master's orders; but, upon this occasion, he replied, briefly:

"It's risking men's lives for naught. If we go in there we shall go to pieces on Chesil Beach, as like as not. You know what sort of a surf's running there to-day, sir."

"Put her about," answered Dainty; and walked forward to enjoy a good look at the boiling Race, about a mile to leeward.

If Dainty asked these questions, it was not the questioning of a fool. He honestly wanted to know what the schooner could do in extremities, and he knew that Mark Redman was not only a first-class sailor, but one who knew every inch of that coast, and was no shrinker from possible peril. Show him the why, and Redman was not the man to blench from danger. It was his employer's whim to yacht in rough weather—good; the yacht was a fine sea-boat, well-found and well-manned, no great harm in that. But such tricks as running through the Race or up the West Bay with a heavy sou'-wester blowing, was simply juggling with life for no reason.

Dainty gets nervously anxious upon this point as the season progresses. If his brother is to succeed in his escape, it must be through the assistance of the Maid of the Mist; and though boisterous weather may favour his outbreak from the prison, though a stormy night may drown the noise of chisel or file, yet how is he to communicate with the island's rock-bound shores under such circumstances? Of course the haven of Portland itself will be utterly debarred him. Men-of-war's boats, pickets of soldiery, and the police, will effectually close any hope of successful rescue on that side. If Maurice is to be got off the island at all, it must be from some of those creeks or fissures used of old by the smuggling community. Can a boat approach such in rough weather? In Dainty's judgment, certainly not; and yet, when Maurice is once out of the prison, every hour he remains on the island makes his recapture more imminent—the proceedings of the Maid of the Mist more likely to attract attention.

When he talks of Jennie on this subject, the girl owns that he is right, but she argues November is usually a much less boisterous month than October.

"To succeed, Dainty, we must trust to have some luck, and I have great faith in our success."

"More than Nance would have, darling," replied Dainty, moodily. "That child's whimsical fancy that I am destined to be your destruction haunts me. I wish she had kept her prognostications to herself."

"You are foolish, my own, to be upset by the fancies of poor half-witted Nance. She would say the same of any

one who threatened to take me away from Upway. Don't you know that she regards me as her good angel, and hates that any one should pay me homage but herself? True," added Jennie, laughing, "she was good enough to make an exception in Mr. Weaver's case, but the quick-witted chit knew that she ran no danger from him."

"Well, Jennie, it has decided me upon one point. I'll not risk your life on board the Maid. I did mean to have asked you to marry me quietly at some one of the adjoining villages, and to have carried you off with me when the time came; now I am going to ask you to wait, and trust me till I return to claim you. Can you do that, dearest?"

"Can I trust you?" returned the girl, proudly, as she reared her head, and fastened her grand grey eyes on his. "You don't understand much about a woman's love, Dainty, or you would never ask me such a question. Do you think, when I gave my heart, I did not give my faith? If I had not thorough trust in you, my love would lie shattered, shivered, this minute. I am yours, Dainty, whenever you think fit to come for me; and if months went by, and I never even heard from you, no testimony should make me think you false till your own hand or your own lips told me that you were what I can never think you. I know how much I am beneath you, but the man I love with my whole soul would never put such misery upon me. If he did," continued the girl, bravely, though not without a quiver in her voice, "whatever pain it might cost me, I would say I was well rid of him."

Dainty's reply was what may be easily imagined. There are episodes in love-making concerning which it is well to remember the old story of Apelles, and draw a veil over, when description fails us. But a whisper did fall upon Jennie's ear, to the effect that she should never have to repent her firm faith in the utterer.

Still both women and men have pledged troth as true time out of mind, and been as thoroughly in earnest as these two at this minute; and yet what has come of it? If there were a cemetery for broken love-vows, how quickly boards of health would have to interfere with the overstocking of the burial-ground!

Dainty goes back to Weymouth lighter of heart; there

is something re-assuring in Jennie's strong, passionate love. That womanly devotion, that refuses to believe in our failure, has been sweet to most of us in our time; has comforted us in our hours of depression, and braced our nerves to once more buffet with the world. The Maid of the Mist is more restless than ever—now fluttering her snowy pinions off the Shambles, now stretching away towards the Isle of Wight; sometimes folding her wings and bringing up for the night just inside the breakwater, and anon returning to her old resting-place in Weymouth harbour. Dainty, too, seems more occupied than ever with the geological formation of Portland. He is incessantly exploring that island. He carries a hammer and a small bag, into which he now and then gravely puts a fragment of rock. He also makes numerous notes, it is to be presumed, upon the same subject.

He has received a great stimulus of late. Maurice, in his last letter, has informed him of Mr. Blades' requirements, and Dainty has promptly replied that the instalment of two hundred pounds shall be duly paid to any one that worthy may authorise to receive it at the "Cock and Compasses," whenever Mr. Blades may say that he is ready to act.

"That's what I call business," said the burglar, when he heard of it. "You tell your pal, as soon as I can light of a hook we are off. He'd best pay up the minute you give him the office I've got it. I must trust you a bit, so I might as well right out. Take your oath the money shall be paid as soon as I say I'm ready; and I won't wait to hear it is so. You see, a hook such as I want is a big thing to run in; and what's worse, it's a cursed big thing to stow away when you've got it home. It ain't easy to hide. These warders are always prying and rummaging about our apartments when we're out—just like so many London landladies, and I'm rather nervous about their coming on my jewel-case as it is. Do you twig?"

And Mr. Blades gave a wink, and indulged in a grimace which he had acquired at a Music-hall at the east end from a popular comic singer.

Carefully has Dainty surveyed every crevice and fissure

on the west side of the island ; for from that alone does he hold it possible that Maurice can escape. Chesil Beach, with its chain of sentries ; the Castle town side, with its men-of-war boats on the *qui vive* ; or the more open shingle about Church Cove, upon which the Custom-house keep people such jealous eye, are all alike, he thinks, impracticable. The West Cliffs, from their steep and almost unapproachable nature, are comparatively neglected ; and yet Dainty thinks, in moderate weather, and more especially should the wind not blow from the south-west, that a boat might creep easily into one of these fissures, and that, with the assistance of a rope, or rope ladder, a man might easily descend to it.

He has drawn a plan for his brother's direction ; he has selected the particular spot that he deems most eligible, and written the fullest particulars that he can think of regarding it. He has directed an agent in London to communicate with Mr. Blades' friends ; and those mysterious individuals have written to their principal, that "the party he's a-doing business with is quite the gentleman, and has lodged one hundred all ready on account."

Mr. Blades' mind is inflamed at this intelligence. Visions of halls of dazzling light on the Surrey side, of comic songs, of unlimited tobacco, of unstinted drink, of the society of ladies more free than polished in discourse, —all these flash across the mind of the burglar. A picture of Elysium, which is, sad to say, confined by no means to the felonious classes ; it is much in vogue under the plausible title of "seeing life" amongst the youth of the metropolis.

Yes, it is seeing life in one aspect, though it is to be feared that those who so affect it, whether on the north or south side of the Thames, don't quite realize the life at which they look on. The skeleton at the revel is beyond their ken. Yet to trace the history of the leading characters thereof, is as gruesome a task as ever anatomist of character set himself down to perform. The lives of those "great comics," how marvellously short they are ! And do you think those of their drink-bemused admirers are profitable to follow out ?

Dainty, formerly so cool and imperturbable, waxes

nervous and irritable under this mental strain. He seems to lack the stuff of which conspirators are made—that calm, equable temperament that nothing daunts, that nothing hurries. Many a promising revolution has been wrecked because some one of the leaders could bear to wait no longer. Fortunately, in this case, the initiative must be taken by Bill Blades, and that illustrious burglar has been used to wait, like a Sioux Indian on the war-path, for the accomplishment of his purpose. There is no fear that he will risk failure by precipitation; and yet, when the time for action comes, Mr. Blades is usually prompt and resolute.

Dainty, also, will probably be cool enough and quick of action when the drama begins, but this anxious expectation of the rising of the curtain it is that frets him. It is not the being under fire, it is the getting there that is the great strain on the nerves of the recruit. When the first shot or two begin to tell, then is the most thrilling time of the battle. You are not yet warm to the work, the fierce lust of carnage has not yet leavened your soul; your comrades begin to drop sparsely at first, then a trifle quicker, and apparently from all but invisible causes. But as you close up, and the corpses lie thick and gory, the blood is in your nostrils, the savour of the strife makes your pulses bound; the savage desire to kill possesses you; the thirst for your fellowmen's lives maddens you; little you reckon who falls by your side then. You scarce pause to look as you press on, always on, till either you stop breathless, flushed and victorious, or reel back with the crushed, broken, despairing sensation of defeat.



CHAPTER XXVI.

DIEPPE GROWS WEARISOME.

MRS. ELLERTON and Rose Fielding all this time are still dragging on a monotonous existence at Dieppe. To the sorrow-stricken mother, this quiet seclusion seems the fittest life she could lead ; but with Miss Fielding it is otherwise. Deeply as she was grieved at Maurice's sentence, acutely as she felt his disgrace and punishment, yet, as is only natural at her age, she has now recovered her spirits. She looks back mournfully still at the sad desolation his crime has wrought, not only on himself, but on all those she holds dearest to her. Nevertheless, at one-and-twenty it is rare indeed that sorrow does not mercifully yield to the assuaging influences of time. Miss Fielding begins to find her present life somewhat hard to bear. She is bored past conception.

Not for one moment does she allow this to become apparent to her aunt. Rosie is far too loyal and too loving in her disposition not to do her utmost to conceal such feelings. No daughter could be more devoted than she to her who had been mother to her so long. But the quick eyes of a woman, so loving and sympathetic as Mrs. Ellerton, are not easily blinded. She saw that, bravely as the girl struggled against it, she was getting moped, distrait, living this isolated life in a never very lively watering-place. It was only natural ; Rose Fielding, the spoilt daughter of a wealthy household, a pretty and popular girl in a pleasant London set—fêted a little for her good

looks, a little for her natural *espèglerie* and clever talk, and perhaps even a little more as an heiress in a moderate way, must after a time feel their humdrum Dieppe life very wearisome.

"It is not good for her," thought Mrs. Ellerton. "It matters little to me where I bear my cross. I never can mix in society again, but in England there would be plenty of people willing to take charge of so pretty and attractive a girl as Rosie. Moreover, is she not still the heiress she ever was?"

There was something consolatory to the poor mother in this reflection, that her son had so frankly confessed his crime.

"He fell," she would whisper to herself, "but he did all in his power to make restitution; he had resort to no subterfuge or legal quibbles; he owned his wrong-doing, and if he wronged Rosie, he is now making bitter expiation for so doing, and, thank Heaven, the child is not a penny the worse."

Mrs. Ellerton did not know of Mr. Laroom's opinion. She was not aware that it was a moot question yet, in legal circles, whether Maurice had not committed perjury to save the woman he loved from the consequences of his fraud. For Rolf Laroom, in his first burst of anguish at the utter collapse of those webs he had been at such trouble to weave, had been by no means reticent concerning Maurice's passion for Miss Fielding; had confided it, indeed, to Mr. Simmonds, and two or three other worthies of that stamp, who, though they could be close as oysters when they saw cause for keeping their mouths shut, yet upon this occasion divined no reason why they should not indulge man's natural disposition for scandalous story. So that Maurice Ellerton's case had been often discussed, both on the Stock Exchange and in the Law Courts.

Rosie, too, of late, has been considerably excited by Dainty's letters. They know that he is staying at Weymouth, and that he hears pretty constantly from Maurice. But while Mrs. Ellerton is under the impression that Maurice has, from interest made in his behalf, good conduct, or some other cause of that nature, obtained relaxation of the prison rules with regard to correspondence,

Rosie is thoroughly aware that Dainty has found means to communicate with his brother surreptitiously. Once more does that idea which she had so preached to her cousin on his last visit cross her mind. Can it be possible that Dainty is plotting Maurice's rescue? If he can send letters to him in an indirect way, he can send files, chisels, rope-ladders, etc.—all the necessities, in short, that Miss Fielding's lively imagination depicts as essential to breaking bonds. Rosie's ideas on the subject are derived principally from the London stage, and novels of the Jack Sheppard or Monte Christo type. She muses over the famous escape from the Château d'If, and wonders whether a sack, and simulation of death, might not be equally effective at Portland. She knows that the great convict establishment is on the sea, and almost persuades herself that Maurice might win his way to freedom in that wise. It is most irritating, she thinks, being so far from Weymouth. If she could but see Dainty, he would tell her everything; and here Rosie makes a little *moue*, for she is fain to confess that Dainty had always been a very good hand at keeping his own counsel, and that all her coaxing and teasing (the combination, too, was difficult to withstand) had at times failed to discover what he meant to do, or what he had done.

She shakes her pretty head, and knits her delicate brows a good deal, as she reflects on this. She wants to know all about it, for she is quite impressed with the idea that Dainty is already engaged in a tremendous conspiracy; and then Rosie feels almost frightened at the idea of being confidante to anything so desperate. Her belief in Dainty's coolness and daring is unbounded. Could she have seen him last week, her faith in that former virtue would have been somewhat shaken. Moreover, there were certain other passages in his life, of late, that Rosie would hardly have regarded with approbation. It was not likely that Miss Fielding would look upon Jennie Holdershed with favourable eyes. Not that there was any petty meanness or jealousy about Rosie, but she rather liked Dainty herself, and therefore could be hardly expected to hear calmly of his appropriation by another; that other, too, a girl so inferior to herself in social

position. But Dainty had never mentioned Jennie's name in his letters. It was scarce likely that he would, although he had not the faintest idea of Rosie's tenderness for himself. He believed that she was attached to his brother.

How blind men are compared with women on this point! A woman rarely fails to discover the victim within her meshes; but men are constantly quite oblivious of their success, and blunder along, all unconscious that the fruit may be had for the plucking; fruit, too, that they would oftentimes have fain gathered, had they but known it might have been easily won. Still Rosie had never deluded herself with the idea that Dainty had more than brotherly affection for her. She knew all about Maurice's sentiments, and rather regretted them. She had carefully abstained from ever giving him the faintest encouragement. If she had a little tinge of the coquette in her—and she had—she at all events did not wish to exercise her spirit of caprice on one whom she loved very dearly, although not quite as he would have her do. And Maurice had felt this; loving her with ever-increasing passion, yet knowing intuitively that his love was hopeless—that to speak would be but to pain her and himself. The bankruptcy of Ellerton, and its consequences, had put an end to all that for ever.

"Rosie," said Mrs. Ellerton one morning, as the girl sat listlessly in the window, gazing vacantly out at the quiet street in which they lived, "I am afraid this is a very humdrum life for you."

"Why so, my mother?"

"You have no friends or acquaintances, child. At your age it is hard to stand so isolated as you do here."

"I fancy Dieppe society would be somewhat harder to endure," replied Miss Fielding, as her lip curled, "if the men who stare so rudely at me whenever I walk upon *la plage*, or the pier, are to be deemed a fair specimen of the male section composing it."

"No, I do not mean that; but I think it would be well for both of us if we moved to England."

"What has put that into your head, mother?" and as she spoke the girl rose, crossed the room swiftly, and seated herself in a low chair by Mrs. Ellerton's side.

"My trouble, I fear, has made me selfish, dear; and I have not sufficiently considered how terribly dull all this is for you."

"My mother, why do you say so? Have I ever complained?"

"No," replied Mrs. Ellerton, with a sweet sad smile, as she drew the girl to her and kissed her; "but do you think it is necessary for my children to complain before I see things are not well with them? You are not yourself, child—the brightness is dying out of you. We mustn't have that, Rosie; and therefore I decree our departure from Dieppe forthwith."

"But are you sure you will not regret it?" said Rosie in a low voice, as she fondled her aunt's hand.

"Why should I?" returned Mrs. Ellerton quietly. "It was as well, perhaps, to go abroad when we did. Nay more, on your account there was urgent reason that we should. And being here, we could not do better than stay. I am not a worldly woman, I hope, Rosie, but I have lived in the world all my life. Our miserable story is no doubt by this time pretty well forgot. If we settle ourselves anywhere but in London, or Brighton which is much the same thing, I don't suppose there will be many people who will recall it to their memory. While you, darling, what have you to do with it?"

"Oh! mother," cried Rosie, reproachfully, "as if it did not concern me! No!" she continued, passionately, putting her little hand on Mrs. Ellerton's lips, "I am not thinking of my property, and you know it. No," she replied, in answer to her aunt's deprecatory shake of the head, "I don't think you were going to say so; you wouldn't be so cruel. But can you think that trouble to Maurice or Dainty is not also sorrow to me? Ah! surely you know me better!" And here Rosie fairly took possession of her aunt, and kissed and fondled her, a slight moisture beneath her long lashes gradually increasing, till both women indulged in the luxury of a good cry.

"Nevertheless, Rosie," said Mrs. Ellerton, at length, "we will leave Dieppe as soon as may be. Write to Dainty at once, and tell him to find us a home in England—you and he shall settle there."

Now that letter, Miss Fielding felt, required a little consideration, so she put on her hat and started for a blow on the pier, during which to think it over. Miss Fielding held strongly to the principle that fresh air was a marvellous clearer of the intellect.

Rosie's first idea was to select Weymouth, but she fell into the natural error that, because they knew Maurice was an inmate of Portland, Weymouth generally was also aware of that fact. She thought their presence there would attract attention; might, indeed, prove fatal to that very conspiracy she so longed to hear about. "No," she reflected, "Weymouth will not do; but it shall be somewhere very near Weymouth."

Bournemouth! Well, she'd never been there, but that could not be far off. Miss Fielding, after due consultation of Bradshawe upon her return home, comes to the conclusion that Bournemouth will do, and sits down to write accordingly.

"Dear Dainty," she says, "mother and I are wearied of foreign parts. We are tired of Dieppe, and so, my cousin, it devolves upon you to find us a home in England. My life here has become painfully monotonous. You know how men will stare at a girl with any pretensions to good looks, who has the misfortune to be continually without an escort; and, Dainty, I am not positively ugly, although, sir, you never do properly appreciate my manifold attractions. But other eyes are not quite so blind as yours, and walking alone here has become positively unbearable. Don't think, though, Dainty, I am writing in this way to you on a mere paltry grievance of my own, but the mother, too, professes herself tired of Dieppe, although, bless her, I half suspect it is a good deal on my account. Still we have made up our minds to leave as soon as you shall send us word you have found a home for us in England. We have selected Bournemouth, and I should imagine you will have little difficulty in finding something to suit us there.

"And now I am all impatience to know what is to come of this correspondence you have opened with Maurice. Have you any idea of carrying out what I once suggested? I suppose I ought not to ask. But, Dainty, I *must* know;

please do tell me a little about it. I promise to be satisfied with only a hint of what you intend to attempt. Am I foolish to ask that much?—I fear so ; but, if you would give me the tiniest inkling of what it is you propose doing, I should be satisfied. As it is, I can think of nothing else. Your continual residence at Weymouth, and your having opened this correspondence with him, must mean something. You know, Dainty, how deeply interested I am in anything that concerns him. For pity's sake, do let me know what you are about.

“The mother is pretty well, and sends her love.

“Ever, dear Dainty, yours,

“ROSIE FIELDING.”

When Frank Ellerton received that letter he was more confirmed than ever in his idea that Rose was strongly attached to his brother.





CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CAPTAIN INTERFERES.



CAPTAIN HOLDERSHED, now it has dawned across him that it is his duty to watch over his niece, and save her from the possible results of her own indiscretion, is much troubled. His confidence in Jennie is unbounded, but he does think that her intimacy with Dainty may give her a sore heart, and wet eyelashes, if he does not see to it. That gallant veteran falls into that very common mistake of thinking that, because he has been round the world, he is therefore essentially a man of the world. As if there were not men who traverse the earth incessantly, and remain children to their dying day, with regard to that somewhat questionable acquisition, worldly knowledge. It may be useful, but it is doubtful whether that intimate acquaintance with the springs of the worse side of human nature—that habitual analysis of the motives of our fellow-creatures conduces much to one's happiness.

Now the Captain is quite aware that when he interferes with his niece, he has to deal with what, in his vernacular, he denominates a d——d mutinous crew! But if there is one thing that dear bibulous old gentleman believes in, after the transcendent powers of that cherished telescope, it is his capabilities of strategy. "Women, sir," he would say, in confidential moments, to his intimates, "won't drive. They must be humoured, coaxed, and then, by blank and blank, you can turn 'em round your little finger." The real fact being, that his lady passengers, in

his seafaring days, had simply bullied his very life out, and led him a very hard time of it indeed; strategetical concessions to Mrs. Thompson having been instantly followed by arbitrary and unconditional demands from Mrs. Johnson. To know of what selfishness and exaction your fellow-creatures can be capable, you must have made a long sea-voyage. To fathom how far women can be unreasonable, you must have doubled the Cape. I have known a lady indignant because there were not fresh eggs for breakfast six weeks after we had lost sight of land. The captains of Green's clippers could strange tales unfold on this subject, if they chose.

The Captain's first steps in chaperonage are unfortunate. To his delicate insinuation that it is unseemly for a young woman to be so much about with a young man as she is with Mr. Ellerton, unless she is going to be married to him, Jennie laughingly retorts:

"Well, there's no saying what I may do, when he asks me."

"But that's just it," replies the Captain, angrily. "He hasn't asked you, and I won't have you go about with him in the way you do."

"How is he to ask me," replies Jennie, demurely, "if I don't give him an opportunity?"

"He's had plenty of opportunities, and——"

"How do you know he's not taken advantage of them?" interrupted the girl.

"He has never spoken to me on the subject," said the Captain, loftily.

"Which is no sort of reason that he should not have whispered a word or two to me," laughed his niece.

"Has he? I insist upon knowing."

"So you shall."

"Go on, Miss."

"When I have made up my mind to tell you."

"Do you call this respect for your uncle, you hussy?"

"That's not a pretty name to call me. Do you consider it's respect for your niece, to hold her guilty of not being able to take care of her own good name?"

"Pitter patter, clitter clatter, chitter chatter!—a woman's tongue is like the wind off the Cape, which al-

ways blows, but never in the right direction ! You are all alike !”

“ Which shows how little you know about us, my dear uncle. Neither are our tongues so given to foolishness as you imagine.”

“ You’re a saucy wench !” replied the Captain sulkily, quite overcome by this last retort. “ But I spoke for your good, child—I did, honestly.”

“ Don’t I know it ?” replied the girl, as she glided to his side, and laid her cheek against his grizzled locks. “ But leave Jennie to herself. Frank Ellerton will work her no harm, believe me.”

So far the Captain had not made much way ; but that does not prevent his still brooding over the subject. He is too chivalrous by nature to descend to espionage of any sort. He confines his telescope still to the discovery of wondrous accidents in Weymouth Bay. The collisions, upsets, and narrow escapes from drowning, that he there continually witnesses, are terrible evidence of the awful recklessness of the Weymouth people, or of their visitors, albeit, the local press still chronicles no loss of life. But the Captain has not abandoned his point ; he can do nothing with his niece ; he will have a talk with Frank Ellerton.

“ Your lords, with such fine baby faces,
That strut in a garter and star,
Have they, under their tambour and laces,
The kind, honest heart of a tar ?”

hums the Captain, moodily, as he reflects over this last resolution ; though why he should connect Dainty with the aristocracy is not quite to be explained. But the veteran having taken it into his head that Frank Ellerton’s intentions regarding his niece are not honourable, lumps him with that visionary debauched upper-class, so dear to the lovers of nautical melodrama ; wherein the dissolute Lord invariably abducts Lovely Sue while honest William is away at sea—William and his shipmates of course, turning up just at the critical moment, and covering that insolent ravisher with confusion.

But while the Captain is still meditating in this fashion, he is suddenly astonished by the advent of Mr. Weaver,

in deep mourning. That gentleman has returned from leave, having, in the interim, buried his father. He has rejoined his regiment, with his passion for Jennie rather increased than otherwise during his enforced absence—with his worldly prospects somewhat improved—and has made his way out to Upway immediately. He has determined to ask Jennie more seriously than ever to share his lot. His father's death has put him into possession of some four hundred a year, and Mr. Weaver is very earnest in his love now that he fancies he has some chance of bringing it to a prosperous issue.

Jennie is out; but the Captain receives him with much cordiality. Tim is a special favourite of his. The Captain cannot but admire a man who can, when called on, take his liquor with so little detriment to himself as Mr. Weaver. Not, as I have said before, that this was a besetting weakness of the Irishman's, but he had a wondrous faculty that way when occasion required him to test it, and could swallow with impunity what would have bereft most men of their senses.

Mr. Weaver's mourning makes the Captain somewhat uncomfortable; he feels that he must restrain his natural disposition to harmony in the presence of such emblems of late sorrow, but he considers it all the greater reason for a prompt production of a bottle and glasses. He fills for himself and his guest with a solemnity befitting the circumstances, and finally winds up by trusting Mr. Weaver "left all well at home." Then becoming conscious of his blunder, he stammers, and finally falters out, "I mean that I hope your mother and sisters are as well as can be expected."

"Thanks, yes," replied Mr. Weaver, shortly; which curttness only further tended to confuse the Captain, who took it as evidence that his unlucky observation had hurt his guest's feelings—a thing inexpressibly disturbing to the bibulous but tender-hearted veteran.

Mr. Weaver, however, was absorbed in thought as how best to broach his attachment to Jennie. For Mr. Weaver had resolved this time to open the trenches in form, and to attack Jennie armed with her uncle's consent and approval. He was in a position now to claim her fairly.

No great match in a worldly point of view, certainly ; but then Jennie was a daughter of the people, and could scarcely hope to do better. It had never crossed Tim's mind that Jennie's heart was no longer in her own keeping. He had never marked how her eyes glistened and her cheeks glowed while he talked of Dainty Ellerton ; and yet what a tell-tale face it was to one who should hold the index ! Her every thought was transparent to him who could read aright. There was no guile about Jennie. Her very soul looked out at you from beneath the straight dark brows. Her play of feature was marvellous, and the girl's countenance answered to every gust of the spirit within, as the sea to the gentle wooing or boisterous caresses of the capricious breezes.

"There's nothing like coming to the point at once," thought Tim at length. "A big fence grows bigger the more you look at it."

"Captain," he exclaimed, "I've come to ask a favour of you."

"Happy, my lad, to do anything I can for you," replied the veteran.

"Well, it isn't exactly a favour, and yet it is—oh ! bother, this'll not do at all. Sure it's your consent and blessing I want."

The Captain stared, as well he might, for he was in complete ignorance of Mr. Weaver's attachment for Jennie.

"Ah, sure you know what it is I mean. You must have seen it all along. I'm consumed with love entirely. You'll not be such an old—I mean you'll not be so devoid of feeling as to withhold your consent."

"What the blank, etc. blank are you driving at ?" inquired the Captain, fiercely.

"Isn't I telling you I am ?" returned Tim sharply. "It 'd be hard to speak plainer, I'm thinking. Maybe it's the liquor has muddled your brain. You've not much of a head, you know."

The Captain turned purple with wrath, but this was too serious to be met with a salvo of his usual artillery.

"My head, sir," he rejoined, majestically, "is clear enough, if other people's were. What the devil do you want my consent to ?"

Rather a relapse, this latter part of his speech.

"How am I to make the old fool understand?" mused Mr. Weaver. "Haven't I been drumming it into him the last five minutes, and sorrow a bit does the old villain comprehend me! "Whist, now! ah, leave the tumbler alone," he continued aloud, as the Captain proceeded to reinforce his dignity with another gulp. "Haven't I been telling you all along I wanted to marry Miss Jennie, and am I not asking you to consent to it?"

"Well, I am considerably (blanked)," replied the veteran, bringing his fist on the table with a mighty thump, "if you ever mentioned Jennie's name till this minute."

"What's that to do with it?" inquired Mr. Weaver, laconically; "if I didn't I meant to do so—it's all the same."

"It's not, sir!" thundered the Captain. "How the — do you suppose I'm to understand you?"

"Faith, and you do now, anyway," retorted Mr. Weaver. "By my father's death, I've come into a little money, and could take care of a wife. Will you give me Jennie?"

"And what does Jennie say about it?" inquired the Captain, with much curiosity and considerable conviction that what his niece said would be a good deal more to the point than any decision he might come to.

"I don't know."

"Never asked her—eh?" said the Captain.

"Asked her, bedad! Oh! yes, I've asked her often enough?"

"And she——"

"Well, sometimes she laughed and said nothing, and sometimes she laughed and said no. But, you see," continued Mr. Weaver, utterly unconscious of the absurdity of his speech, "she's clever is Jennie, and knew that I'd nothing to keep a wife on. And then," continued Tim, diplomatically, "I hadn't your consent."

"Well, my lad," replied the Captain solemnly, "you have it now, and my best wishes for your success. But there are two things to bear in mind—I can't interfere with my niece's feelings" (diplomatic this remark—"not successfully" should have been added), "and that other confounded fellow's always carrying on with her."

"Fellow!—who?—what is he? Name the spalpeen!"

"Well, as I tell you," continued the Captain, confidentially, and taking no manner of notice of Tim's last remark, "he's always about with her. I've spoken to her on the subject, but the jade pays no attention at all to the old uncle who brought her up."

This was quite a poetical flight on the part of the aged mariner; but the Captain is by no mean singular in his illusion. We all of us are blest with venerable relatives who, if ever we distinguish ourselves, are powerfully impressed with the idea that they remotely contributed to it. A friend of mine, who has made a name for himself, often complains that he is oppressed now with the attentions of a maiden aunt, who, in his early days, regarded him with the utmost hostility. "I was relegated to the nursery," he once remarked, "on her spiteful accusation more often than for all my concentrated sins of the twelvemonth put together."

"But who is this man?" inquired Mr. Weaver, returning to the charge.

"He's an intimate friend of yours, unless you've been yarning about him; but I never liked him from the first. Maybe you'll not be so fond of him either, now that you find he's a rock ahead.

'And yet, my boys, would you believe me,
I returned with no rhino from sea,
Mistress Polly would never receive me,
So again I heaved anchor—yo, yea,'"

hummed the Captain, as an appropriate commentary upon Mr. Weaver's case.

But that gentleman was, for the moment, wondering which of his brother-officers had so supplanted him in a few weeks, and paid little attention to his host's subdued melody. Not one of them had ever known Jennie when he left; who could have so rapidly taken his place in her regards? True, she had always pooh-poohed him when he waxed earnest in his love, but he had always rejoiced in the ineffable satisfaction of thinking that he had no rival in her affections. Who could this man be? And then Mr. Weaver's thoughts carried him off into some peculiarly Irish ideas of "satisfaction to be demanded,"

and the benighted views the authorities in these times took of duelling, more especially in connection with officers in the twin services.

"But who is he?" exclaimed Tim, at length.

"Get out with your blethering about who he is! If you hadn't been singing his praises at the pitch of a strong sou'-wester, maybe she'd never have learnt to care for him," retorted the Captain, testily. "D'ye think the best way to win a girl is to be always singing another chap's good deeds in her ear. Take a man who has been about the world's advice, and chant your own qualifications next time."

"But who the devil is it? Can't you speak, you obstinate ould sinner!" cried Tim, fairly losing his temper.

"By —!" replied the Captain, furiously, "I'll stand no more——. Ah! here he is, and can speak for himself." And, as he spoke, Jennie, followed by her lover, entered the parlour.

"Dainty Ellerton!" ejaculated Mr. Weaver, aghast.

"How do you do, Mr. Weaver?" cried Jennie. "Welcome back to Upway."

"How are you, Tim;" said Dainty quietly.

But the Irishman was simply dumb-founded. He shook hands with them mechanically. With his hero-worship for Dainty, he felt that if he was his rival it was indeed all over with him.





CHAPTER XXVIII.

BOURNEMOUTH.



A BRIGHT, breezy morning, the beginning of November. The white fleecy clouds scud lightly across the sky, and the waves come tumbling in all glitter and foam upon the sands of Bournemouth, tossing their white crests as if in exuberance of mirth. A real sunshiny autumn day; one on which nature bids defiance to the chill, saturnine embrace of winter, now threatening her with swift and relentless approach. The wind sings blithely through the pine woods, whirls away the fallen cones, and what dead leaves it may come across, and tosses the feathers in the hats of the fair promenaders by the laughing waters. A lovely morning for a stroll, and the firm white sands are plentifully dotted with loungers.

Pacing up and down, engaged in somewhat earnest conversation, are Miss Fielding and Frank Ellerton. Dainty has duly acquitted himself of his commission, and his mother and cousin are now installed at Bournemouth.

"So you've sold out," remarks Miss Fielding. "And you so fond of the regiment, too. What made you do that?"

"Don't be foolish, Rosie," returned her cousin, brusquely. "You might answer that question yourself, if you took the trouble to think, I should imagine."

She looked at his moody face earnestly for a moment, and then said, hurriedly:

"I am so sorry—forgive me. It was on Maurice's account, I suppose?"

"Yes," he returned, roughly. "You don't suppose such an anomaly could be tolerated, as a forger's brother in a hussar regiment, do you?"

"Don't talk so, Dainty," cried the girl, imploringly. "Surely they never mocked you for Maurice's crime?"

"I wasn't very safe to jest with," he replied. "Besides, in society men don't mock, as you call it, on these occasions, nor women either. They merely drop you."

"The cowards!" cried Rosie, as her eyes flashed. "Did they? Were they mean enough to do that?"

"I scarce gave them much chance. I cut society before it cut me. I didn't even try my old comrades very hard. I kept aloof from them as much as possible after the trial. I have relieved them now altogether of my companionship. It was better than to risk such bitterness as finding those with whom you had lived almost as a brother shrink from you."

"Dainty," said Rose, after a pause of some minutes, during which she had pondered over his last speech, "you've been wrong, I think. It is your own morbid fancy has conjured up all this. I've lived in the world, too, remember. You have fled from it, not it from you. You have turned misanthrope, my cousin, and rail at society without sufficient reason."

"Do I?" he replied, abruptly. "Mark me—you are the forger's cousin! See if society forgets that!"

"It may make a difference with a few," replied Miss Fielding, gravely, "but I don't think the best of my friends will do otherwise than pity me for the sorrow I have undergone."

"And what could be more insufferable?" retorted Dainty, sharply. "I would sooner be jeered at than pitied. Insolence one may resent, but commiseration ties your tongue and hands."

He was in such a state of nervous morbid irritation at his still compelled inaction, with regard to Maurice's contemplated escape, that he waxed exceeding bitter in speech to all with whom he came in contact. Jennie alone seemed to have power to soothe him. It was a singular contrast to his old cool *insouciant* manner, but when a man takes a misanthropical view of his fellows for a twelvemonth, it

is surprising the psychological change that is sometimes worked in him. Little more than a year ago, and with all his knowledge of life, there were few who believed more thoroughly in the better side of human nature than Dainty Ellerton. He was rather prone to promulgate excuses for the black sheep, and had been known to stand up for some very deeply dyed additions to the brigade of "*les enfans perdus*," when much more intimate associates of those errant sinners remained mute.

"But, Dainty," exclaimed Miss Fielding, suddenly pausing in their walk, "what is it you are doing at Weymouth? I know you are in communication with Maurice—you told me that much. Is there any chance——" and here she dropped her voice—"is there any chance——" she continued falteringly.

"Of his being pardoned," interrupted Dainty. "None in the least."

"Don't be foolish," said the girl impatiently; "you know what I mean—do you think there is a possibility?"

"Of course there are always possibilities, and when any possibility takes place in which you are interested, rest assured you will hear all about it." "Yes," he muttered to himself, "it is likely to be well advertised if it comes off."

"But may I not know just a little of what you hope for now? Won't you give me a tiny hint, Dainty?" asked Miss Fielding, in pleading tones.

"No," returned her cousin, more kindly than he had as yet spoken to her. "There are things, Rosie, that are best not talked about till accomplished. I hope to do Maurice some good by staying at Weymouth—that is," he continued jesuitically, "to make his burden easier to bear."

"In what way?" said Rose.

"Haven't I just said I won't tell you, *ma mie*?" replied Dainty, laughing; "and do you think I am to be brought to confession by your insidious cross-examination? But come along, it's high time I was on my way to the station."

The two accordingly made their way to the railway, Rosie still revolving in her mind how she was to extract the intelligence she wanted. It was evident Dainty was

not to be won in confidence just now ; but, as she bade him good-bye, she whispered :

“ Mind you write and tell me what you are doing , and don't let it be long before we see you again.”

But Dainty only nodded in reply. He thought that the Maid of the Mist might be called upon to perform her part almost any day now.

When Dainty got back to his lodgings at Weymouth, he found that he had good reasons for such forebodings. On his table lay a small packet. He hastily broke it open. It contained a letter from Maurice, in which he said that Blades was now quite prepared to act ; that it was impossible for him to state positively upon what night their attempt would be made ; but that he, Dainty, might hold himself from this in constant readiness to assist.

“ Once out, Dainty,” continued Maurice, “ and acting according to your instructions, I shall endeavour to make my way to the western side of the Bill. I shall doubtless run much risk of recapture in doing so, and unless I find a boat there on the night, am pretty certain to be retaken. To retrace my steps by daylight will be impossible, and so ignorant as I am of the ground, concealment there would, I imagine, be equally so. Assistance, therefore, must be prompt, and for that I know I can rely upon you implicitly. I have studied the little chart you sent for hours, and think I can find my way to Rufus Castle in the first instance. There you promise me a guide and further instruction. Don't let him fail me, for I shall need him sorely.”

At last came action. Dainty knew now that it behoved him to keep nightly vigil, and listen for the boom of the big gun from the Verne that rings out to the island, and the men-of-war in Portland harbour, the intelligence that a person has escaped ; to look every morning if the black ensign was flying from that ominous flag-staff. It must be a night escape, he knew. To break out of Portland by daylight would be simply impossible ; the very dogs would bay at the grey arrow-stamped garb—the children point at it, should it be seen wandering alone a mile from the prison ; while their more practical sires would band together to seize the fugitive, with a view of



sharing the five-pound reward consequent upon his recapture. Those that traffic most in smuggling articles into the prison, are equally alive to the profit accruing from replacing the deserters in the hands of the authorities. That beautiful sentiment of shielding the offender from the clutches of the law, let his crime be what it may, which characterizes the peasantry of Ireland, has no parallel in Portland.

"The man's a murderer, and therefore a hero," shrieks Tipperary.

"Faith you've caught him, worse luck," re-echoes Clare, "but it'll be a mighty sickly autumn with the jury if the crathurs venture to convict."

The administration of justice is fraught with difficulty when it is sufficient to be in antagonism with the law to enlist the sympathies of the people. Mr. Blades, the preceding Sunday, had held forth at some length to Maurice.

"You may tell your pals we're on the go any night now that looks favourable," observed that worthy. "I've got all I want—leastways I've found an iron hook that'll serve our turn, and I've hid it outside near the forge, where I can get it at any time. It ain't a nice thing to smuggle in, and that's a fact, and I don't mean to try till the last moment, as it ain't a handy thing to stow away snug when you've got it; and the evening I bring it in I mean going. Now just pay attention to what I'm going to say to you. You've a bit of string, haven't you?"

Maurice nodded assent.

"Well, I always get into my cell a few minutes before you do. I'll give you the office at dinner-time. When you come in before sun-set, you must tie that string to your broom which you have to put out beneath the door. I'll have a hole drilled through our partition, and you must pass that string through to me. Then minding to leave your broom out, before your cell door is locked you must slip into mine. If we are once locked up together, I'll go bail we're outside the prison before morning."

"But will you have time to bore the hole?" inquired Maurice.

"Shall I have time?" replied Mr. Blades, contemptu-

ously. "I'd make a hole you could put your head through in ten minutes. But recollect this part of the business you must manage for yourself. When you are once locked up with me, I'm responsible."

Mr. Blades, locked up for the night, and left to his own meditations, that Sunday indulges in much self-communing.

"Yes," he mutters, "I shall get out, no fear about that; but shall I get off?—that's the question. It would be aggravating to be brought back, with a nice little nest-egg of two hundred pounds, besides the contingencies waiting for one in London. Hum! it is doubtful. It would be easy if it wasn't for one thing. Yes," continued Mr. Blades, testily, "it's the clothes, that's what's the matter. They're so conspicuous. These prison boards have no taste. It's perfectly sickening to a gentleman who dresses quiet, as a rule. Grey drab, done over with arrow heads, is too demonstrative for anything but a fancy-ball. Wherever you go, you're bound to attract attention. Well, I shall have to borrow some decent togs, I suppose. I should like to go off in a suit of the governor's own. But I suppose popping in upon him in the small hours would be a little too risky. Clothes, yes, that's where it is. I must get clothes somehow. Rum thing is life!" mused Mr. Blades, as he stretched himself on his pallet. "Here am I, in for burglary, and going out to commit another—not from what the big wigs describe as an 'unbridled lust of crime,' but simply because the prison board has such infamous taste in dress. Knickerbockers may do down here, but I must contrive a pair of trousers to go to town in."

And with a grin at his last reflection, Mr. Blades closed his eyes in peaceful slumber.



CHAPTER XXIX

THE ESCAPE.

THE third day after that on which Mr. Blades had fallen asleep, while still lost in bitter reflection upon the *bizarre* attire forming one of the conditions of penal servitude, he whispered to Maurice, with motionless lips, as they tramped out after dinner each to his respective labour :

“I’m going to bring that hook in to-night. Remember what I told you—if you’re locked up with me to-night, you’ll be a free man before sunrise to-morrow. If you ain’t, you know, I shall be compelled to leave you behind, which would be a pity, ’cause you’ll never get out by yourself. Mind you’re pretty spry about the lock-up.”

Not quite the truth this, on Mr. Blades’ part. He had no intention of going without Maurice. He was too interested in a pecuniary sense for that. Freedom without money that philosopher would have described as pickles without boiled beef. But he did want Maurice to achieve this first little act in the drama, and Maurice must trust to his own unaided faculties for that. It was not that the burglar could not have broken through the partition between the cells, but it would take some time, he argued, and Mr. Blades thought they might have none to spare. True, if his theory was right. If he had made no mistake in his scheme, it would not take above an hour or two ; but, from many experiences, Blades deemed that it was very possible he should encounter unforeseen obstacles.

As for Maurice, he was thrown at once into a state of feverish excitement. Very different his sensations from those of his cool, calculating, callous comrade. His work, of late, had taken him out of the quarries. He had been employed with some hundred of his fellows upon the fortifications of the Verne. He went through his work less mechanically than usual; he was flushed with the idea that it was for the last time. While, ever and anon, dawned upon him an uneasiness about whether he should perform his part successfully. All of a sudden, as he plied his spade mutely just over the road, there came upon his ear voices and laughter. He raised his head. Some three or four officers of the garrison passed, in plain clothes, within a few paces of where he was standing. He dropped his head hurriedly, for he recognised Mr. Weaver amongst them. That the wild Irish boy, whom he had so often entertained, should see him in his shame, was insupportable. He need not have alarmed himself; Tim Weaver would have had to stare hard before he recognised his courteous, well-bred host of former days in that grey, drab-clad man, with the brickdust complexion.

The long afternoon—long only in Maurice's imagination—wears away. The recall bell rings at last, and, with lips and fingers twitching with impatience, Maurice troops home with his companions. They undergo the usual searching, and are marched off to their cells. Maurice enters his, but the time has not yet come for action; supper has to be disposed of first. That done, and there are still about two hours to the lock-up. It is in that time that Maurice must slip from his own cell into Blades'. He has tied the string to the handle of his broom, and, passing the other end of the string through the hole which he finds all ready for him, he thrusts the broom out beneath the bottom of the door, in accordance with the prison regulations. He knocks against the partition to warn Blades that he is about to make the attempt. Then he listens anxiously to the footsteps of the warder passing the hall. As these die away in the distance, Maurice opens the door, closes it softly behind him, and, in the next minute, he is in the adjoining cell. So far good; now to accomplish being locked up there in lieu of his own.

"Keep still," whispered the burglar; "we must be all ears till the key is turned."

Well-nigh forty minutes of tedious waiting, and then Blades mutters, "He's coming. I've the string; put your mouth to the hole, and speak up when he knocks." The sharp authoritative rap of the warder is now heard on the door of the empty cell. "Here," shouts Maurice, through the hole as, with a prompt jerk of the string, Blades withdraws the broom beneath the bottom of the door. The sharp click of the lock is the sole reply. Then Blades answers to a similar summons on his own account, and withdraws his broom. The key turns upon the cell-door, and the conspirators have, at all events, achieved a fair start.

"And now," exclaims Maurice, in a low tone, as the footsteps of the warder were once more lost in the distance.

"Well, now," replied Mr. Blades, coolly, as, striking a match he lit a taper, "we'll reeve ropes for a bit. Just you hold that, and blow it out sharp when I tell you. I can work just as well in the dark as not, after a few minutes." With that he produced a knife, and proceeded rapidly to cut his bedding into strips, knotting them together firmly as he did so.

"Out with it," he exclaimed, as his quick ears caught the patrolling warder's steps once more approaching their neighbourhood, but his busy fingers relaxed not one whit their task on account of the darkness. He continued to knot his strips together with praiseworthy assiduity. "Now show a light again," he exclaimed, at last. "Come, there's near thirty feet of it, and that ought to be enough. Anyway, we can't have more—there's nothing left to tear up." And, as he spoke, he was busy testing his work, pulling at the knots, finally making fast to one end of it his last acquisition, the hook. "There," he said, "you're to carry that and the light. Wind it round you. Stop, wait a bit, I don't quite know how deep this is, to begin with. We may want the rope, though it ain't likely." And with that the burglar turned his attention to the floor of his cell, which it must be remembered was on the basement. Maurice saw now that two of the planks had been bored with holes across, almost as close as a gimlet could

be got to work. This had been repeated at a distance of three feet. Mr. Blades now went to work with his knife, and in about fifteen minutes segments of the two boards were removed, and disclosed an aperture about three feet by two.

The burglar took the taper and peered down.

"All, right," he muttered; "it's not above six feet or so. I'll go first. See you have the lucifers handy. Throw down the rope, and then follow me."

So saying, Mr. Blades let himself down through the hole he had made, and in another second called to his companion to come along.

It was with some impatience that the philosophic Blades awaited the rekindling of the taper. He knew perfectly well what he was aiming at, but he didn't at all know how near he would be to it when he first got beneath the floor of the Hall.

"Now," said the burglar, as he threw the light around, "what we're a-looking for is the ventilating shaft. When we find that we're all right. We're going out by that. It's very clear we haven't hit it to start with. Now, you see, there's a stone wall this side, and a stone wall that. We must go through one of 'em, that's clear. The question is which. If I don't make a mistake, that'll be the outside wall."

"Well, why not set to work at that, and have done with it?" said Maurice.

"That's just the sort of question you might be expected to ask," rejoined Mr. Blades, in tones of lofty superiority. "That's exactly what a greenhorn would do. That outside wall would probably take some hours to get through. Now this other, you see, is most likely only a foundation wall; run across to carry the flooring, and, if so, not above a few inches thick. We must tackle that."

And the burglar, with only the aid of a couple of big nails, a chisel, and the hook, did tackle it with such a will that, after some three quarters of an hour's hard work, he succeeded in getting out the first stone.

As he had anticipated, it was but a foundation wall—what would have been described as a nine-inch wall, had it been built of brick; and once having prized out one

stone, Blades had no difficulty in making a hole sufficiently large for himself and Maurice to pass through.

But if the burglar was somewhat jubilant at his success it was with some anxiety that he looked about for the ventilating shaft on gaining the other side. Not a sign of it, but at about twenty feet they were confronted by another wall of similar character to the one they had just broken through. Maurice's heart fell, and he expressed his apprehensions that they should fail ultimately.

"Fail be hanged," replied Blades, fiercely. "Look here, we're in for it now, and this child means going through walls till he's either out or interfered with. Hold the light again." And the burglar attacked this new obstacle with the same dogged skill and determination that he had the last.

Similar were the results, both as regarded success, and the time taken to achieve it. But even Mr. Blades felt somewhat chap-fallen, when, upon gaining the other side, he could discover no sign of the ventilating shaft, and found his further progress once more barred by another foundation wall.

"There's nothing for it but to go on," he muttered; "but if this ain't pretty well the last, we shall be beat for time."

They are still under the floor of the hall, and, so far, have not progressed about fifty or sixty feet from their starting-point. The perspiration stands upon Mr. Blades' forehead as he works strenuously at this new impediment. His labour, too, is retarded by the necessity of its being carried on without much noise, as he fears to attract the attention of the patrol above his head. He is getting a little anxious, too, on the subject of time, and the possibility of there being two or three more such walls to make his way through. At last the first stone falls out.

"We shall soon manage it now," says the burglar, mopping his forehead. "How long d'ye think we've been? Has it gone twelve yet, I wonder?"

"I don't know," whispered Maurice, "but I should fancy it was about that."

A few minutes more and Mr. Blades has made an opening big enough for them to squeezé through. He holds up

the taper and looks around. Maurice points despondently to another wall confronting them at about the usual twenty feet.

"Yes," mutters Blades, "I expected that; but we will look along to the right a bit before we decide it's necessary to bore through it. It should be hereabouts, and, by gosh, it is!" exclaimed the burglar, triumphantly. And as he spoke he pointed exultingly to a circular opening in the wall before him. "That's what I've been a-working for all along. That leads us into the ventilating shaft."

Grasping the taper, Mr. Blades thrust his head and shoulders through the aperture, and peered into the passage, but the current of air almost immediately extinguished his light.

"Well, it can't be above three or four feet to the bottom, so here goes;" and in another second he called out, "Come along. There's daylight," he continued, as Maurice gained his side, pointing to a faint glimmer of light some twenty paces from them. They were in the shaft. Daylight of a very comparative description, nevertheless—the faint light of a waning November moon; and yet to those two adventurers, who had been burrowing for the last four hours beneath the floor of the building, it seemed genuine daylight. They shrank back from it in dismay. Had they gained the outside too late, after all? For both knew there was much yet to be done before they stood outside the prison.

Cautiously they crept towards the light. They found themselves in one of the main openings of the shaft, standing in a species of well, with an iron grating about four feet square, just above their heads. They were outside the hall.

"We're in luck," whispered Blades, after looking about him a little. "The workmen were busy about this to-day, and they haven't fastened it down yet. We shall have no trouble here. 'Hist!' he exclaims—"crouch down!"

They had hardly sunk upon the ground before the watchman passed—passing, indeed, within six feet of the grating—which, however, it did not occur to him to examine. Slowly his footsteps die away as he turns the angle of the adjacent building, and as he does so the prison clock clangs

two. "Later than we thought—a deal," whispers Blades; "but come along—we must be outside before he comes round again. We've about an hour in hand. Give me a lift on your shoulders, while I see what I can do with this grating."

But this proved a very easy affair; the grating could scarcely be said to have been fastened down at all, and a vigorous hoist of the burglar's shoulders lifted it immediately from its bed, and Blades, placing it on one side, scrambled out, and then turned to give a hand to his companion. They were now in one of the prison yards, lighted, as all these yards are, by a gas-lit lamp-post in the centre. Keeping close within the shadow of the wall, the two men rapidly skirted this yard, and the next. So far all had been easy. There were no gates between the yards, and nothing to stop them. But this third yard was a different matter. Opening upon it were the grated doors of the next hall, and between them and the lamp-post in the centre it was essential, according to Blades, that they should pass. Quite possible, thought the burglar, that the patrolling warder inside the hall might see them flit across in the lamplight. He paused a moment, then whispering to Maurice, "Follow me close, and do as I do," continued to creep cautiously along the wall.

Arriving at the grated doors of the hall, Mr. Blades threw himself upon his stomach, and wriggled past them like a snake. The grating ceased about two feet from the ground, and he was therefore invisible to anybody within. Maurice duly imitated him, and the fourth yard was gained. There what was called the wicket separated them from the outer yard, in which was the main entrance to the prison.

But it need scarcely be said Mr. Blades had no desire to trouble the main gate, where he would probably find a warder within, and most assuredly an armed sentry without. This wicket, however, was quite part of his scheme. He had measured it with his eye often, and saw how useful a ladder might be made of it. It was a large iron gate, about twelve feet high, with the scroll worked arch above it perhaps fourteen, locked of course at night, but standing open by day. Quite as good locked—indeed, perhaps better, for Blades' purpose. He had seen that to climb

this gate, and get on the wall by the side of it, would be easy. This, now, he proceeded to do.

"Look sharp about this," he muttered to Maurice, just previously to swinging himself up the iron-work. "Recollect we shall be against the sky-line now, and nobody who comes along can possibly overlook us."

But it was easy work for two active men to scramble up that gate, and, in a couple of minutes, the pair were standing together on the wall adjoining the wicket. There a range of buildings, the gable apex of which was some twelve feet above them, ran at right angles from where they stood to the outer wall of the prison. These were the quarters of the bachelor warders. The married men are allowed the privilege of sleeping outside.

"We must go along here," said Blades, as he crept stealthily up the tiles, and then proceeded to scramble along the ridge of the building.

But, arrived at the end, the burglar uttered an exclamation of dismay. It did not run within about fourteen feet of the outer wall, and that it joined it Blades had deemed quite certain. Still, though there was a difficulty, it was by no means insurmountable. There was another wall below them that bridged this gap, but it involved a descent of about twelve feet from the building they were on, and an ascent of the same to gain the exterior wall.

"Give us the rope," said Mr. Blades. "Dropping down twelve feet to hit a wall two feet broad, with a twenty foot fall if you miss your tip, is a little too risky."

In another minute Blades had hitched the hook on to the coping of the roof.

"Go first," he said to Maurice, "and when you are landed steady the rope for me. I shan't be able to give the hook quite so good a grip of the tiles as it has now, or we shall never succeed in unhitching it again."

Maurice obeyed in silence, and gained the wall below in safety. He then steadied the rope as directed, and in a few seconds his companion was by his side. It took them some little trouble to unhitch the hook, but this also was accomplished after a bit, and then, by Blades' orders, Maurice sat down, which enabled the burglar to pass him. Having thrown the hook over the opposite wall,

Blades drew his rope gently back, and the hook caught the top. With this assistance they easily reached the outer wall of the prison; along the top of this the burglar scrambled like a cat for some distance until, clearing the building, they found themselves above the main road.

"Now," said Mr. Blades, "we'll go down here, and then we're free."

This was a comparatively easy affair. The hook was made fast to the coping with considerable care this time, for they could afford now to abandon the rope, and then Blades led the way. Although he could not see how near to the ground the rope reached, yet the burglar felt little misgiving on that score; he had calculated the height of that outside wall many a time, and knew he could have but very few feet to drop. He was right: he saw the road just beneath him when he let go his hold. Maurice speedily followed, and then the two men stood side by side outside the prison—escaped from Portland Prison, but still far from having escaped from Portland.

"We're out, mate," said the burglar, as he wrung his companion's hand. "Bill Blades has kept his word, mind. And now we split and squander—each going for his own line. Recollect, if you don't find cover before daylight, you'll have lost a night's rest for nothing. Hist!" he suddenly exclaimed, as his quick ear detected the sounds of some stir within the walls. "They've found out something's up. Wish you luck." And Blades sprang quickly over the low fence on the opposite side of the road, and disappeared.

For a few seconds Maurice stood gazing up at the sombre sky. The moon had disappeared, and but few stars twinkled in the heavens. He was free; there was ecstasy in the thought. But he was sore puzzled just now what to do with his freedom. The truth was he was lost, and knew not which way to go. Closely as he had studied the little plan of the island with which he had been furnished by Dainty, still he could make out nothing of the country by this dim light. He had with him a small compass, but he could not see to read it. In which direction lay the Race, in which the breakwater, he had no conception. Still he did know he could not stay there

upon the high-road. He must leave that, at all events. So, after a few seconds' reflection, he also jumped over the fence, and commenced making his way across the fields. Blundering along blindly, painfully, not knowing whither he was going, fancying danger behind every wall, seeing a foe in every shadow, and ceaselessly haunted with the idea that some one was dogging his footsteps, Maurice can hardly be said as yet to taste the sweets of his newly-acquired liberty. Shrinking from all habitations, thirsting for information that he dare not ask, longing for day and yet dreading it, conscious that the light would reveal his leprous raiment, so did Maurice continue to wander vaguely through the fields. Suddenly on his ear booms the sullen roar of a gun, and he knows that their escape has been discovered. Still he presses onwards, though he knows not where. He has some undefined idea that the further he gets from the prison the safer he will be; and yet, in consequence of his want of knowledge of the ground, and the obscurity of the night, he has not got very far from it, after all.

At length he pauses and listens. He hears a low, faint moaning, as the breeze freshens on his cheek, but it never occurs to him what evil presage of his adventure that is, and yet a Portland fisherman would have foretold boisterous weather from that moaning of the wind. Then he hears the soft rippling of the waters, as the waves break gently on the shingle. Ah! he is near the sea, then. He wants to find the cliff. If he can reach that, he thinks he may find his way to Rufus Castle. He is promised assistance in that vicinity. If he can but reach the ruined tower of the Red King, all may yet be well with him. Anxiously he makes his way towards the low murmuring of the surf. He has hit the cliff at last—but still, what part of it? He does not even know which side of the island he is on. He sits down to think, and gazes blankly around him. At length two steady and brilliant lights arrest his attention. Surely those must be the lighthouses on the Bill? He thinks over the plan that he had studied so closely in his cell. Yes, he must by chance have attained his object. He looks back upon the way he has come, as far as he can guess it. Those must be the lamps about the

prison, he reflects. If he follows the cliff in the direction of the Bill, he will arrive at his rendezvous. He rises, and scrambles on over stone walls, down a broken, rugged pathway, till at last he can indistinctly make out a dark mass a little above him. He toils upwards again; it is evidently a building of some sort, and, as he nears it, he sees that it is a mouldering grey ruin. This must be the tower of which he is in search.

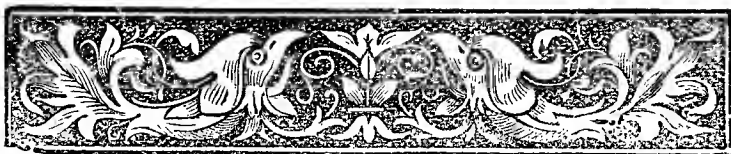
Suddenly, as if she had sprung out of the earth, a female is by his side. He starts, but before he can open his lips she says quietly:

"Maurice Ellerton, this is the third night I have awaited your coming. Take these quick—go into the tower and change your clothes." As she spoke, she handed him a bundle.

Maurice lost no time, but retreating into the roofless building, rapidly exchanged his prison dress for the rough sailor's attire which the bundle contained.

"Now follow me," said Nance, as he once more rejoined her. "You must be safely stowed away before sunrise; and I think it's likely you'll have to lie close for a couple of days. The wind is rising, and the shores of Portland will be no place for a boat to come near for the next eight-and-forty hours, unless I'm mistaken. Stop one moment," she continued; "it would be as well to hide these things," and Nance thrust Maurice's cast-off garments into a crevice of the rock, and then tumbled some loose stones on the top of them. That done, she beckoned him to follow her.





CHAPTER XXX.

THE ALARM.

NOW it so happened in that long red-tiled building running from the wicket nearly to the eastern wall of the prison, and which served as a dormitory to the unmarried officers, tossed upon his bed a restless warder. Whether he was suffering from unrequited love or indigestion, from disordered imagination or disordered liver, matters little; the primary fact remains—there was a warder unable to sleep. How keenly alive the ear is to the slightest noise on such occasions, is familiar to all of us. The scratching of a mouse behind the wainscot, the pattering of the rain, the fantastic weird melodies of the wind, all fall upon our hearing with wonderful distinctness at such times. This wakeful warder became conscious of a confused scrambling above his head. Cats was his first impression; but upon mature consideration he rejected that solution. It was neither light enough nor quick enough for cats, he argued. What can it be? There must be something on the roof—something must be somebody. “Prisoners escaping!” he suddenly exclaimed, and sitting bolt upright in his bed, he listened with all his might.

But the fugitives had by this time gained the outer extremity of the building, and were noiselessly descending to the wall below. All was still. Suddenly came a quick scramble and a couple of bumps—it was Blades jerking

the hook from its hold. "No mistake about it this time," thought the officer, springing from his bed, and proceeding to huddle on his clothes as quickly as possible. "There is somebody on the roof," and nobody could be upon the roof at this time of night save for unlawful purposes. With that the warder hurried downstairs, and cast a hasty glance up at the building as he gained the yard. Nothing to be seen. But he did not think much of that; they had doubtless passed. That a prisoner had escaped, or was escaping, he felt convinced. He rushed to the main gate and gave the alarm. The fugitives at this time were preparing to descend into the road—were, indeed, still upon the outer wall, and, but for one thing, might have stood considerable chance of recapture then and there. The one point in their favour was this, that the prison is quite as much barred to the warders as to the convicts in their charge. Once the gates are locked, nobody can open them without reference to the Governor, or the Deputy Governors, who reside just outside, and who alone are in possession of keys of the gates. All within the walls are under lock till the next morning. Consequently, when the alarm was given, it was not till the sentry outside had aroused the authorities that egress from the prison was possible. But in the meanwhile intimation has been given to the warders in charge of the respective Halls. The officers come tumbling out, and a rapid investigation is made of every room. In less than half an hour it has been ascertained that **Blades** and **Ellerton** are missing, and the authorities are contemplating the *débris* in the former's cell. A patrol has discovered the rope, left dangling from the outer wall, and is busy searching the fields opposite, but make little of their quest in the uncertain light. Ere another half hour has elapsed the big gun has boomed out the intelligence over Portland Harbour. A detachment of the garrison are doubling down to Chesil beach, to draw a cordon of sentries across it, and two or three men-of-war's boats are stealing vigilantly along on the Castletown shore, to cut off all chance of escape by water in that direction. Morning breaks, and discovers the black flag flying on the staff at the **Verne**. But so far no trace of the fugitives has been

met with beyond that dangling rope. The whole story of their escape lies bare ; whither they have betaken themselves is a problem still to be solved.

The gun that sounded so sullenly to Maurice, painfully making his way through the obscurity he knew not where, fell also on the ear of Dainty, keeping lonely vigil in the "Portland Arms," in the lower town of Portland. He had lived there the last two or three days, and sat night after night awaiting this signal. The people of the house did not know his name very correctly—not that Dainty made any attempt to conceal it. It bore no significance to them. Who are within the walls of the prison is unknown, except to the officials of the establishment. The name of the criminal in a great trial soon fades out of the memory of the multitude. Dainty's sole claim to their attention was that he owned the Maid of the Mist ; he was the eccentric gentleman who yachted so late in the season.

Dainty sprang to his feet at the report of the gun. At that time of night it could only be *the gun*—that which announces to the whole island and the ships in harbour that a prisoner has escaped. It cuts two ways—the boom of that ominous caannon. If on the one hand it sets in motion all the springs essential for the fugitive's re-capture—if it advertises to the needy that there is a five-pound note to be earned by whoever shall succeed in giving intelligence of where he may be lurking ; yet, on the other, it proclaims to his friends, should he have any, that the prisoner has slipped his gaolers, and is now ready for such help as they are prepared to render him.

Dainty threw up the window and listened. Nothing met his ear but the low moaning of the breeze. It struck him with far more significance than it had Maurice ; he saw at once what a terrible obstacle was likely to arise to his scheme. He knew that moaning was but the prelude of a gale. To take Maurice off the island till it had subsided would be an impossibility. How was he to be concealed all that time ? Every hour's delay was fraught with danger, and yet it would have to be encountered ; if it came on to blow, it would be probably eight-and-forty hours before there would be a chance to send a boat ashore

at the point he had selected. The ordinary landing-places were, of course, debarred him. Dainty had determined to attempt his brother's rescue from the low rocks that lie on the western side of the Bill—a dangerous spot to approach, except in favourable weather ; even in a heavy swell a boat would run considerable risk in approaching them, and would be liable to be stove against their sharp, jagged points, unless well handled.

As he ponders over these things, his attention is aroused by the quick regular tramp of many feet. He leans out of the window. Some forty or fifty grey shadows hurry by, and occasionally a firelock gleams in the dim light of the lamp in front of the hotel as they pass. It is the picket, on its way to Chesil Beach. Dainty's lip curls as he mutters, "We don't mean to try that way, at all events."

But he suddenly reflects ; it was time he was up and doing. Meditating on what the weather is likely to be will not assist Maurice, nor can he do any good by remaining at Portland. His brother, he trusts, is by this time in the guidance of far cleverer heads than his, as far as relates to concealment on the island. His business is to get into Weymouth as quickly as possible, and put to sea with the Maid of the Mist, if practicable about mid-day. Of course there are no trains at that time of night, but he can walk. It is only about four miles, and a tolerably direct road. Dainty lets himself quietly out of the hotel, and makes his way down the hill towards the railway-station. Leaving that on his right, he tramps steadily along the road, which here runs on the eastern edge of the Chesil Beach.

As he arrives at the narrowest part of the beach, he is arrested by the sharp rattle of a firelock brought down to the charge, and a gruff voice demands imperiously, "Who goes there?"

"A friend," replies Dainty, and promptly advances steadily towards the sentry, who, when he arrives within some half a dozen paces, calls upon him to halt. True to his military training, Dainty does so. The soldier advances two or three steps, and scrutinises him narrowly.

"You don't look like a convict," says the man at length. "Beg pardon, sir, but there's one out to-night. I can't

let you pass till the officer's seen you. He won't be a minute before he's here."

"What is it, Adams?" exclaimed a voice some few paces behind them; and attired in grey military overcoat and forage cap, an officer came rapidly forward. "Who have you got there? Dainty Ellerton, by the powers!" he ejaculated, as he peered into Dainty's face. "What on earth brings you out convict-catching?" and then Tim Weaver stopped, covered with confusion, as it flashed across him that Maurice Ellerton was one of the luckless denizens of Portland. He could have bitten his tongue out for his thoughtless speech.

"I am not convict-catching, as you term it," retorted Dainty bitterly. "It was my good fortune, when in the service, never to be employed in such ignominious business. I never listed to perform police duties, and should have left the army long before had I been set to such dirty work."

It was a cruel taunt, but allowance must be made for how sorely wrung Dainty's feelings had been by his brother's shame. The shattering of our idols is desolation to most of us; and till that terrible afternoon in Berners Street, Dainty had looked up to his brother as one of the best fellows—one of the truest, loyalest hearts he knew—he would have staked his life on Maurice's integrity—would have appealed to him on a delicate question of honour, and abode by his decision unswervingly.

"Ah, Dainty," cried the Irishman, imploringly, "don't be hard on me! Sure the words slipped out by accident. I'm clean mad with meself for vexing you. It's all right, Adams," he continued, turning to the sentry, who had already ordered his forelock, and was looking with no little curiosity at his officer's confabulation with the mysterious stranger. "You'd better keep a sharp lookout, Portland way."

"I don't suppose you did think of what you were saying, or who you were saying it to," replied Dainty slowly. "You never did, that I can remember," he continued, with a faint smile. "But you don't want to detain me, I presume?"

"Deuce a bit," replied Mr. Weaver; "except I'd be

mighty glad of your company. "It's dull, lonesome work this picket business. Have a cigar, Dainty, and just the last taste of the crathnr before you go!" and the Irishman produced a well-furnished flask. "Ah, just a drop," he continued, as Dainty shook his head in the negative. "Just put your lips to it, as a sign you forgive me."

Thus adjured, Dainty took a gulp from Mr. Weaver's flask, and accepted the proffered cigar. Then bidding his entertainer good night, he strode on in the darkness.

"Faith," muttered Mr. Weaver, as Dainty's steps died away in the distance, "if there's a man has the gift of saying the wrong thing at the wrong time, it's meself. I suppose it's bred in me. If there's been a death by choking in the family, I'll go bail I'd begin talking about hemp. If a man's wife has run away from him I'd never forget to inquire after her; and when two fellows are dead cuts, I'm just the boy to ask thim to dinner to meet each other. By the Lord! it's just my luck! I wouldn't be surprised this minute if I was employed trying to take Maurice Ellerton. There's fifteen hundred of 'em in there, and I'll engage they don't stay for the fun of the thing. It's mighty hard if none of the other fourteen hundred and ninety-nine have taken advantage of my being first for picket. Good heavens! what should I do, if this should happen to be Maurice, and he attempted to come through here! I wouldn't have it so for all I'm worth—and I'm a gentleman of means now," muttered Tim, grinning, "and haven't to think for five minutes before I take a sixpenny cigar. And what's the good of it all?" he continued, as his face fell. "There's the girl I'm mad about, in love with another—the darlint! Ah, well! when it came to choosing between me and Dainty, small blame to her—I'm only a blundering poor devil at the best; but I love her, too, very dearly."

And here, overcome by his reflections, Mr. Weaver took a copious pull at his flask; and having lit his pipe, continued to smoke and hum snatches of nautical ballads, culled from Captain Holdershed's *répertoire*, till relieved by another detachment of his regiment, some two or three hours after daybreak.

Dainty, meanwhile, hurries along through the night,

and ere the first streaks of dawn are visible in the sky, stands upon the quay at Weymouth. A few minutes' search, and he has aroused a boatman, and puts off for his own yacht, which lies anchored in the harbour. Discipline is strict on board the Maid, and there is a man on watch, pacing the deck. Dainty quickly runs up the ladder, gives orders that he is to be called at nine, and then betakes himself to his berth.

Strange, but he is asleep in five minutes. He who for the last week has found it so difficult to sleep, now slumbers like a child. Now the drama has begun, his nerves are braced. It was anxiously awaiting the rise of the curtain that unhinged him. He knows, too, that he may have no chance to lie down to-morrow night, and is anxious to economize his powers. His sporting instincts have taught him that. When you are on the moors, and the evening's whist runs late, it is well never to miss an hour's slumber that you can lay hands on. Both your whist and your shooting will benefit by such timely economy of your strength.

But when Dainty comes on deck next morning, he finds his prognostications of last night regarding the weather only too closely verified; it is blowing a stiff breeze. Shall he put out to sea or not? Impossible that he can do anything in such weather, and the wind is freshening every hour. There is every prospect of its heightening to quite a respectable gale by sundown. Inaction is very painful to Dainty, but a cruise, as things stand at present, would be worse than useless. It is better that he should remain on the spot, so that he may receive any communication the fugitive may send him. Not much likelihood, certainly, of that, yet he may hear something of Maurice in the course of the day. In the meantime, he sends off a laconic and somewhat enigmatical note to Jennie:—

“Found our friends out last night. Shall not go fishing to-day; the weather is too rough. Yours ever,

“DAINTY.”

That done, he has to undergo what has oftentimes been the lot of great men in the conduct of mighty enterprises—bite his nails and watch the weather. From the days of the Armada to the terrible story of Napoleon's gigantic raid on Moscow—from the snows of the Crimea to Chanzy's death-struggle on the Loire—the barometer has had much to say to the solution of events.





CHAPTER XXXI.

"AE FAREWEEL, ALAS ! FOR EVER."



R. WEAVER, since he has discovered that Dainty is his successful rival in Jennie's good graces, fights rather shy of Upway. He feels that he is *de trop* there, and accepts the situation as he best may. Modesty is certainly not one of the Irishman's attributes, and, were it any one else, he would by no means have resigned his pretensions so easily. But to contend with Dainty—to enter the lists against the hero of his boyhood—would be in his eyes supremely ridiculous. Had Jennie's partiality been declared in favour of any other, Mr. Weaver, nothing daunted, had still contested the prize ; but with Dainty it was different. Loyalty to his school-boy idol forbade, if nothing else, not to mention the hopelessness of striving against Dainty in anything.

Captain Holdershed fumes and frets a good deal over the present state of affairs. Tim Weaver is a prime favourite with that bibulous old gentleman, while his successful rival is rather the reverse. "A kid-gloved, dandified whipper-snapper !" the ancient mariner designates him wrathfully at times, and angrily demands of his niece what she means by fooling with a popinjay like that, when an honest gentleman is willing to take her for his wife.

What a popinjay means exactly, the veteran is not so clear about, but it is a good word. George Eliot says that "the right word is always a power, and communi-

cates its definiteness to our actions." Similarly is there much comfort in an undefined term when abusing our neighbours. We reiterate it with infinite gusto and self-complacency, as containing more malice and uncharitableness than we should like to commit ourselves to in plain English.

But the Captain, in his irritation, feels it his duty to go a step further than this. He conceives that it behoves him to interfere between his niece and "the popinjay"—that the girl is making for herself a bed of thorns—that she runs the risk of being won and thrown on one side. "White-livered, light-kidded popinjays are always scoundrels!" growled the Captain to himself, dogmatically.

Not much of the "white liver" about Dainty, all the same. He would look death straight enough in the face in time of difficulty or danger, but his fancy for being well gloved still clung to him. He yachted in gloves—a thing to make even yachtsmen shudder, how much more this genuine old sea-dog!

There's a story told of a well-known staff-officer, who was seen drawing on a new pair of straw-coloured kids just previous to "going in" at the Alma. Upon being jeeringly told that he might perhaps find all decoration superfluous ere another sixty minutes were over his head, he retorted, curtly, "If I am shot, I should like to be shot like a gentleman." Dainty had similar feelings, and would also have repudiated the idea of leaving the world ungloved.

But although the Captain has made up his mind to have a serious talk with Jennie, and to exercise his avuncular authority in Mr. Weaver's behalf, yet that gallant mariner feels considerable difficulty in screwing up his courage to the point. He cannot conceal from himself that his niece has shown a very determined will of her own upon the few occasions on which he has thought fit to interfere with her despotically. Indeed, the Captain can call to mind none upon which she has not asserted her right of independence. He fears that threat so often held *in terrorem* over him, "that she will relinquish the superintendence of his establishment, and return to live with her own people at Portland." Yet he has his duties as an uncle, his authority as an uncle; and then the Captain

indulges in a wondering soliloquy, interlarded with strange nautical oaths, and the terms "munity" and "discipline."

To a soft-hearted man, such as the Captain, with all his bluster, is in reality, feminine mutiny is the thing of all others that he is most unfitted to cope with: albeit, like many a father of a family, whose womankind twist him round their fingers, he believes himself a domestic autocrat. Still, the Captain, brooding wrathfully over the deprivation of Mr. Weaver's society, resolves, in homely phrase, to have it out with his niece the first favourable opportunity.

It is the morning after Maurice's escape, and the veteran, by way of bracing himself to his task, is indulging in a song from his favourite composer, while awaiting Jennie's appearance, and breakfast.

"Go patter to lubbers and swabs, d'ye see,
'Bout danger, and fear, and the like,
A tight water boat and good sea room give me,
And 'tarn't to a little I'll strike,"

warbled the Captain. "Confound it," he muttered, "that's where it is she'll cut in with that slippery tongue of hers, and, jam me on a lee coast, I know she will. But—

'Avast, nor don't think me a milksop so soft,
To be taken for trifles aback,
For they say there's a Providence sits up aloft,
To keep watch for the life of poor Jack.'"

He seemed to derive much comfort from the final stanza, and was reiterating the last lines in jubilant tones as Jennie entered the room.

"They say there's a Providence sits up aloft,
To keep watch for the life of poor Jack.'

Good morning, my dear. You're late turning out."

"Yes; only a few minutes, though, and you shall have your tea directly." replied Jennie, as she busied herself with the cups and saucers.

The Captain fidgeted about the room, and more than once cleared his throat in a determined manner, but somehow the words would not exactly come. He sat down to the table, and although his appetite was not visibly affected.

yet he was so obviously ill at ease that, had not Jennie been pre-occupied, she must have noticed it. But Jennie's mind was full of what might have taken place at Portland during the night, of the rising wind, of Dainty, and what would come of it all. She of course knew that the attempt was to be expected any night. She knew, none better, what risk Maurice would run in remaining on the island, and was equally alive to the dilemma boisterous weather would entail upon the conspirators. No wonder she is anxious and distrait this morning.

"Hark ye," exclaimed the Captain abruptly, "I don't think it creditable for a young woman to go trapesing about with a man, unless he has professed honourable intentions towards her. You don't know the world, my girl, but I do; and it's my duty to warn you off the rocks and quicksands of a popinjay's tongue."

The Captain thought that last remark rather happily turned, and continued his oration with renewed confidence.

"It can't be expected that a girl like you who has had no experience of the wickedness of—of" (chaps he nearly said, but a happy inspiration suggested world), "the world, could be expected to see these things like a man who's sailed round it more than once. When I see you cruising in bad company on a lee shore, it's my bounden duty to speak out."

He glanced at his niece as he finished speaking, but her appearance was not particularly re-assuring. Her head was raised proudly and defiantly, and as she pushed back the heavy masses of brown hair from her temples, the slightly flushed cheeks, sparkling eyes, and *mutine* mouth augured ill for docile submission on her part.

"Well, why don't you answer?" he said after a short pause.

"Because you haven't asked me anything as yet," replied Jennie.

"Why, you hussy," retorted the Captain angrily, "do you mean to deny that you are always tramping about with that Ellerton chap?"

"Certainly not; I walk with Dainty Ellerton whenever he's good enough to take me out."

"And I tell you there must be an end of that," said the Captain, bringing his hand down heavily on the table. "I'll not have a niece of mine lose her character in such way."

"Nobody but you ever ventured to insinuate aught against it as yet," replied the girl spiritedly.

"Look here, lass. D'ye think a fine gentleman like that ever means to make you his wife? Do you know what'll be the end of all your philandering and strolling? A sore heart and wet eyes, or maybe worse; and, by Heaven, if he wrongs you, child, though I'm an old man I'll have his life, if I swing for it!"

The genuine love for her displayed in her uncle's last speech completely melted Jennie. The girl's rising passion was quelled. She rose from her seat, passed quickly round the table, threw her arms round the old man's neck, and kissed him.

"Listen, uncle," she whispered, still caressing him, while her long lashes were just a little wet, "I am Dainty Ellerton's promised wife. He cannot marry me till some business he is at present engaged in is satisfactorily settled. But in a very short time now that will be all over; then we are to be married, and you will have to be at the wedding."

"I don't like him, Jennie, and I never shall. I wish you could have fancied the other. He's the best stuff of the two, to my thinking. But if that dandified chap means honestly by you, and you like him, of course I've nothing to say. But I mistrust him, child."

"Yes, because you're a prejudiced, unforgiving old sailor, and can't forgive his being a bit of a dandy. But wish me joy, uncle, won't you?"

"God bless you, girl, and may you be happy! And now, you wheedling puss, get me my pipe."

Jennie had scarce filled and presented her uncle with his pipe—a sure sign that he stood in high favour with her—when she received Dainty's note. It was, of course, perfectly intelligible to the recipient, and she decided instantly that she would go into Weymouth and see the writer. There was no particular necessity for this, but Jennie knew that the Maid of the Mist could do no good

by putting to sea in such weather. She wanted to hear how things were going on. She thought her counsel might be useful; and, clinching argument of all, she wanted to see Dainty. It might be the last she should see of him for some time—indeed, in all probability, would be so. Should he succeed in carrying off his brother, of course he must sail for foreign parts, and weeks, if not months, must intervene before he could return to England. Then, again, if he should be discovered, as was only too likely, how large a part he had played in Maurice's escape, he would run considerable risk in setting foot in the country—at all events, for some considerable period. Jennie saw all this clearly, and felt she must bid her lover good-bye. True, he didn't ask her to come, but the quick-witted girl understood that. He did not wish her to be compromised in any way in his attempt. He did not wish her to risk her reputation by visiting him on board his yacht. "But the proprieties can't be always observed," said Jennie to herself, with a little grimace; "and, Dainty, my darling, I must see you once more before you go."

So Jennie seized her hat, and leaving the Captain to meditate upon how his projected storm had dissolved into peace and sunshine, started for Weymouth. The veteran, in fact, was musing in a very unsatisfied fashion over the scene of the morning. He had meant to be a lion, and knew that he had been a lamb. He had a dim idea that he had been somehow cajoled, bamboozled. It was not so, of course, but he had that kind of feeling. He had made up his mind, screwed up his courage, to assert his authority, and it had all ended, as he expressed it, "in soap." Of course he wished his niece to be happy, but then he wanted to dictate how she was to arrive at happiness. And then to lose the chance of a nephew who had such a faculty for conviviality as Mr. Weaver, grieved the old gentleman much—and all on account of a popinjay! The Captain clung fondly to that expression. His aversion to Dainty was so strong that he was still inclined to disbelieve in his acting honestly to his niece; and had not Jennie luckily left the cottage, he would most assuredly have once more resumed his brief for Mr. Weaver.

On her arrival at Weymouth, Jennie made her way at once to the harbour. Her quick eyes speedily detected the *Maad* of the *Mist* still lying at her moorings, and, hailing a boatman, she desired to be put on board. The master marvelled much, as he slipped down the accommodation-ladder to assist the lady. Since he had been in Mr. Ellerton's service, this was the first visitor he had welcomed up those steps, and he had often mused over the unusual solitariness of Dainty's life, compared with his former experience of yachtsmen. Yes, Mr. Ellerton was in his cabin—would the lady prefer to go below at once, or should he send down to Mr. Ellerton?

"Show me there, if you will be so good," replied Jennie; and the master, who, although possessed of a wife and three or four children, had all a sailor's admiration for a handsome woman, led the way himself.

"Jennie!" exclaimed Dainty, with astonishment, as the door opened. "Welcome, my darling;" and, oblivious of his skipper's presence, he took her in his arms and kissed her. "But," he continued, as that functionary discreetly withdrew, "I don't think that you are very prudent to come and see me here. It's a very scandalous world, my own, and people will talk, you know."

"If they will, they must," she replied, proudly. "Dearest, I could not let you sail without coming to say good-bye. But for the accident of this wind, I should not have had the chance. I am not selfish enough to say that I am glad it is blowing so hard, but I had not strength of mind to renounce the opportunity of telling you once more——"

Here she paused, looked up into his face with a somewhat tearful smile, and then hid her flushed cheeks on his breast.

"Of telling me what, pet?" asked Dainty, as he bent over her.

"That I love you," she whispered.

"My own," he murmured, as he clasped her closely, "I shan't be gone very long; ere three months are over, I shall be back to claim you as my wife. It will have to be a very quiet wedding, Jennie, as I shall not wish to call attention to my presence in these parts."

"All that shall be as you will," replied the girl; "only let me hear that you are safe through this business, and I can wait patiently till it seems good to you to come for me."

"I think, Jennie, I'd prefer a little more impatience on your part," retorted Dainty, laughing.

"Ah!" she replied, smiling, "don't you know that a woman can be both—patient to bear for the man she loves, and yet be impatient to see him again at the same time? But, Dainty, have you heard anything of Maurice?—have you heard anything from Nance?"

"Not a syllable. I only know that two prisoners escaped last night. I heard the gun, and came through the picket on Chesil Beach between four and five o'clock. It must be they."

"Yes, of course it would be they. Nance, I suppose, thought she had better keep on the island to aid your brother. The girl is sharp-witted, and would understand what this wind meant as well as you or I do. She would know that no boat could near the western side of the Bill while this gale lasts, and would never run the risk of guiding him there to-night."

"You think she's to be trusted" asked Dainty.

"Yes. She does not like you, but she'll be as true as steel to me; and, forgive me, Dainty, but to bind her thoroughly to our interests" here Jennie faltered a little, "I told her I was going to marry you."

Dainty said nothing, but his hand played fondly with the girl's rich brown tresses.

"You are not angry with me?" whispered Jennie.

"No; you are at liberty to tell whom you choose of our engagement—though you remember I told Nance myself."

"True, I forgot. But, of course," she continued, "you must start the moment there is a sign of the wind's dropping. He will run considerable risk if he makes his way to the Bill, and finds no help when he gets there. Nance is too well acquainted with what can be done, and what can't, to let him attempt it, if positively hopeless; but she will bring him there the first night there is a chance, even if it be a risky one. The child does not know what fear

is, except connected with the Lady of the Well—she does stand somewhat in awe of her. And now, Dainty, kiss me and let me go. God bless you, my own dearest, and send you safe through this affair. I shall see you no more till you return to fetch me; but you will write to me, won't you?"

"Yes, as soon as I possibly can, if it be ever such a scrap."

"Ah! that's good of you," returned the girl, as she yielded to his embrace, and their lips met in a long, passionate kiss. "Once more, good-bye, my dearest."

Dainty escorted her on deck, saw her into the boat, exchanged one last warm pressure of the hand, and then stood leaning on the taffrail watching her progress to the quay.

The next time he shall lay his lips to Jennie's, God help him, for he will need it sorely.





CHAPTER XXXII.

MID THE RATS AND THE DARKNESS.

F Dainty Ellerton passed a restless, anxious day on board the *Maid of the Mist*, in Weymouth harbour, his brother was undergoing a weary time of it at Portland. He had been conducted by Nance to a barn on the outskirts of Southwell, a village standing just off the cliff, and distant something like two miles from the Bill. There his guide, after calling his attention to a heap of clean straw, and cautioning him on no account to venture out until he should see her again, left him. Worn out and exhausted with fatigue and excitement, Maurice threw himself upon the straw, and was soon sound asleep. When he awoke he could see, by the faint light that broke through the dilapidated roof, that the sun was high in the heavens. How long he had slept he knew not. He got up and looked about him. He was in an old and apparently disused barn. Broken and rusty agricultural implements lay scattered around—a couple of barrows without wheels, the *débris* of a tax-cart, a fractured spade, a plough eaten up with rust, a bit of a flail, two or three shattered hoes, a few rotted sacks, etc. But all bore signs of having been long abandoned by their owners. The place was festooned with cobwebs. There were holes in the roof through which the wind whistled shrilly, and the shutter was torn off the “pitching” window, that window through which, in former days, the labourers had been wont to throw in the sheaves from the top of the harvest-carts. That the place had been long deserted was evident. The bundle of straw upon which he had slept

alone showed signs of being of yesterday. That had doubtless been thrown there for his special accommodation.

With some little difficulty he climbed up to the window, about six feet above his head, and peeped cautiously out. He saw a grey sky, through which the wild, fleecy clouds were hurrying, as if fearing to be too late to enjoy the gale at its zenith, while there gleams fitfully a dying autumnal sun. Opposite is a house, which one glance tells him is tenantless—ay, has been so for months, perhaps years. The shattered windows, dilapidated roof, all those small unmistakeable, undefinable signs that mark the decay of houses, as they do of humanity, are palpable. To my mind there is nothing offers such a parallel to our own wearing away as our deserted dwellings. A deserted house is a dead house. And as, when our pulses cease to beat, it is the “window of the soul” that are the first of our mortal remains to perish, so in the dead house the windows are the first thing to disappear, and leave but their empty frames behind them. Two or three tumbling-down out-houses complete the picture. Not a soul—not a living thing is in sight.

Maurice drops wearily down again. He has not tasted food since yesterday evening, and becomes aware that he is possessed with a ravenous appetite. If there is one thing that stimulates our conscience it is an unsatisfied intestine. If there is one occasion more than another that awakens a lively sense of our wrong-doings, it is a combination of hunger, solitude, and cold. How venial our sins look after a good dinner; how ugly they shape themselves on Lenten diet! Most of our great city criminals have lived well. To be a participator in a gigantic fraud requires some dulling of the moral perceptions. Successful robbery necessitates high living. Perpetrators of such are wont to suffer from remorse when they come to that “bunch of leeks—the soldier’s fare.”

I do not mean to say that Maurice Ellerton is experiencing now for the first time the agony of remorse. He had undergone that before his trial—before he had been sentenced to penal servitude for life—before he had given that testimony against himself at Westminster which first

made him a prisoner. But now, cold, hungry, and exhausted, all the miserable story of his crime once more racked his conscience-stricken brain. No man understood more thoroughly than he how all social position was forfeited to him for ever—that he had dragged his own family down with him in his fall—that the stain of the forger must rest upon them all.

Bitter had been his reflections while yet within the prison, but bitterer still were his thoughts this afternoon. He to whom they all so looked up had trailed their name through the mire. Rose, to whom he had never ventured to tell his love, what must she think of him in reality—a trustee who would have—indeed, had—robbed her of her all? What matter that he had made confession, and by so doing restitution—could that atone for the disgrace he had cast upon her—upon all connected with him? He knew well that the crime of the criminal cleaves also unto his relatives.

And if he succeeds in his escape, he muses, he shall have to meet all these. His mother!—that is different; what will not a mother forgive to the child she has nursed? Dainty, too, has stood loyally by him throughout; but Maurice cannot forget how his brother reeled back that afternoon in Berners Street when he first told him of his shame. But how is he to face Rose Fielding, the woman he adores, and yet *robbed*? And as Maurice thinks over this, he mutters to himself, “It were better for all that I should die. The green turf grows over many a story of infamy that perishes with its author. Of the dead, men speak with bated breath, and the stone that would be cast freely at the living is withheld when the mark is but a fresh-filled grave.”

Restlessly he paces up and down, absorbed in these sombre reflections. Yes, he thinks it would be well that he should cease to exist. What will he be?—a broken, disgraced man, living under an assumed name in a foreign land, haunted by the perpetual fear that his real history may be disclosed. Is that a future to look forward to? Why had he not the courage to die in Berners Street? No, that was impossible; restitution had still to be made then. Well, it had been done. Could he do better for

all those he held dearest than lay down his life this very afternoon?

His eye wandered instinctively round the old building, as if in search of some weapon wherewith to carry out his purpose, but no means readily suggested themselves to his imagination. To the resolute man resolved to die the way is never wanting, but to the waverer—to the man of Maurice Ellerton's weak moral calibre—the weapon, the rope, or the poison must be at hand. Such men never commit deliberate self-murder. If they perish by their own hand, it is in a sudden spasm of depression or remorse. Should it occur to their mind that the razor requires stropping, it is a hundred to one that the fatal gash is never inflicted. That clinging to life instinctive to humanity intervenes, and saves them from the sin of suicide.

Maurice is no hero—nothing but a weak, criminal man, whom love once inspired with a certain mock heroism; with ordinary physical courage, but incapable of high resolve or dogged resolution; never likely to rise again from the mud to which his sin has consigned him. If he appeared at Westminster to endeavour nobly to expiate his crime by self-sacrifice, it must be borne in mind, on the other hand, that he had stooped to pick the pocket of the woman he professed to love, and that there is hardly a lower step of degradation open to man.

As the physical craving for food becomes more intense, Maurice dismisses from his mind all reflections on the past. He becomes too absorbed in his present necessity for further retrospection. The waning light tells him that the day must be drawing to a close. Once more he climbs up to the little window. The wind is driving the now darkening clouds before it at a fine rate, and it is evident even to Maurice's inexperienced eye that it is going to be a dirty night. A slight swirl of rain dashes in his face even as he gazes, but the gale is managing affairs with a high hand, and bustles the storm-clouds along before they have time to dissipate their contents. Nothing to be seen—not a sign of living creature. Another half an hour or so, and he will be alone in the darkness. There can be no chance to leave the island to-night, he thinks. Dainty has told him that he may have

to lie concealed perhaps for forty-eight hours—that to bring a boat near the Bill in boisterous weather is an impossibility. Will any one come near him? he wonders. Surely they will remember that he is without food? He will wait till it is a little darker, and then, if nobody comes, he must creep out at all hazards, and look about him. He throws himself down upon the straw, and tries to sleep, but he is too hungry and anxious. Soon he becomes aware that he is by no means sole tenant of the deserted barn. There is a restless movement in that far corner behind the barrows. What a fool he was not to examine the place thoroughly while the light lasted! He raises himself on his elbow for a moment to listen, and then, as a slight squeal catches his ear, drops back with a sigh of relief, as he recognises that he has but the rats for his companions. He hates rats; he pictures himself there dying by inches from starvation, too weak to drive them away. He can see their fell, gleaming eyes and grinning teeth, as they gather round him, only waiting for a few hours more to fasten upon their helpless prey. He jumps up from his straw, and the rats scuttle away squeaking to their burrows—gibbering at him, so it seems to his excited imagination.

But the place is too cumbered with rubbish to allow him to pace up and down in the darkness. He stumbles over more than one decaying implement of husbandry that it had never been worth any one's while to remove since the last tenant had emigrated. Once more he creeps back to his straw, and again it occurs to him that such freedom as that of a hard-hunted animal is a doubtful blessing. Will his future life be one long struggle to hide himself from the myrmidons of justice? Is he destined to be ever fearing discovery, ever flying at scant notice to avoid re-capture? He had thought nothing of all this in the prison; he had pictured to himself that, his escape once accomplished, and some far country safely reached, he should begin a new life, unknown, unsought. Now it seems to him that, wherever he may fly, he must live in perpetual dread of recognition, in constant fear that men shall point at him as they tell the story of his crime, in continual terror of arrest.

Suddenly he hears a slight noise at the door; he draws his breath hard—is it a friend or foe that has discovered his retreat? He can make out that the door opens slowly; he sees that some one has entered; he can distinguish a shape against the outer gloom, dark though it is. He remains silent and motionless. His visitor quietly closes the door; another second, and then comes the sharp scrape of a lucifer, and he sees that it is a woman. She lights a lantern, which she produces from beneath her cloak, throws back her hood, and says softly, “Mr. Ellerton, I am a friend.” He rises, and gazes at her with some surprise. It is a face he never saw before—the face of a young and handsome woman, her brown hair somewhat tossed by the wind, and wet from the driving showers. She, too, regards him attentively for a few seconds, and then exclaims :

“You may trust me thoroughly. I fear you must be very hungry, but it was impossible to risk bringing you food before dark. The escape is known all over the island, and there are plenty of prying eyes on the look-out to earn the reward.”

“I owe you a debt of gratitude for coming at all,” he replied. “I can hardly conceive what motive can have interested you in my behalf.”

He felt instinctively that this was no woman whose help had been bought with gold, or could be purchased in that fashion. He was also clear that this was not the girl who had met him at Rufus’s Tower the previous night, and conducted him thither; and here his further speculations were all merged into what might be the contents of that basket which she now produced, and proceeded to unpack.

“Here is bread, cold meat, a bottle of beer, and a flask of whiskey. You had better fall to at once. I will talk to you while you eat, for I can only stay a few minutes. Of course, as long as this wind lasts, you must lie close here. It will be dreary work, but there is no help for it. Nance—it was she met you last night—or myself will bring you food after dark, and one of us will come for you when the weather shows signs of abatement. I need scarcely say the sooner you are off Portland the better.”

He had wanted no second invitation to begin his meal, but even his hunger did not prevent his being struck with his visitor. He ruminated with his mouth full upon how on earth a handsome woman like this came to be mixed up in his affairs.

"I saw Dainty—your brother, I mean," she continued, blushing, "to-day. He is only waiting till the wind falls to bring his yacht round to the West Bay; all is ready to take advantage of the very first chance. Till then you must stay here. Is there anything more you want that we can manage for you?"

"Nothing; I shall do very well. I should like a light, but that, I suppose, would be dangerous?"

"Yes, it would be certain to attract attention. Even my little lantern is a risk, and must be put out now. Good-bye," and she extended her hand frankly.

Maurice was much touched; at all events this girl did not disdain to cross palms with the convict. He took it almost reverently, and raised it to his lips.

"You are very good to me," he said, gently. "I have nothing but gratitude to give you in return for all you have done. Tell me your name, that I may know how to remember you."

"Jennie," she replied, briefly. "Good night, and be careful not to stir out."

As she spoke, she turned to the door, extinguished her lantern, and the faint click of the latch, as she closed it behind her, announced her departure.

He stretched himself once more on the straw that served him as a bed. Things looked very different from what they had a short half-hour ago. The blood coursed warm through his veins. His meal had put new life into him. He was once more sanguine of escape, and of the future. It is so difficult to be hopeful of anything when we are cold and hungry. Add to which, Jennie's shaking hands with him had done him much good. He felt that he was no longer the outcast he had deemed himself. This girl must, of course, know his story, and she had not shrunk from him. She was no brazen, crime-stained woman, that he would swear. He had read the pity in her pure, sweet face, as she stretched forth her hand to

bid him good-bye. She had succoured him, from what motive he was unable to guess, but he felt sure that no sordid reasons had influenced one like her in this matter. She had not gathered up her skirts for fear they should suffer contamination from contact with a felon. She had said good-night as if he were a fellow-creature, not a human pariah. She had given him her hand; and to this man, still dreading the contact with the world which he believed to lie before him, that stood for so much. If she, a stranger, but knowing his history, could do this, surely there would be others who might regard his sin as not altogether past redemption.

Then he began to muse over whom she could be. How came it that she should call his brother Dainty? He had marked the slip, and noticed the blush that followed it—the light of the lantern happened to fall full upon her face as she spoke. Though his jaws were busy at the time, yet his eyes were equally so. When a man used to the society of refined and graceful women is severed for many months from the sex, the first woman he meets that is fair to look upon is an event in his life. Even his hunger had not sufficed to make Maurice overlook his visitor's handsome face.

"What can she know of Dainty?" he muttered. "How comes such as she to be mixed up in a business like this?" And here he yawned, for the liquor, after his long fast, had made him drowsy. He felt tolerably indifferent to the rats now. "What has Dainty got to do——" Here he became oblivious. And the wind blew, and the rain plashed, and the sea roared, and the rats squealed, and Maurice Ellerton slept as tranquilly as if he had been back once more in his old home.





CHAPTER XXXIII.

MR. BLADES IN HIS VOCATION.

THERE was considerable excitement within the gates of Portland on the boisterous day that followed the escape of Mr. Blades and Maurice Ellerton. The authorities could not but feel some admiration for the ingenuity that had planned, and the perseverance and audacity that had carried out the feat. It was all clear as daylight to them how it had been achieved, after their investigation. They knew pretty nearly what tools even the fugitives had possessed to work with. They had drawings taken of the whole business, to be lodged amongst the archives of the prison; and they can show strange things, and tell you still stranger stories, of what has happened within their walls, and they list, can those who rule over Portland. They knew perfectly well who had been the prime mover in the business. They recognized Mr. Blades' artistic touch quite as readily as a London detective might have done. They had known what a great man they had held in their custody, but they had never quite acknowledged his greatness till now. Nothing would have gratified Mr. Blades more than the admiration expressed for his genius, could he but have heard it.

"A knife, a nail or two, and a gimlet's about all he must have had to go through those walls with," exclaimed one of the warders, enthusiastically, "and he's breached 'em just as if they were so much touchwood."

Mr. Blades, as we know, had a little more than that, though not very much.

How he had come to associate Maurice Ellerton in his flight did somewhat puzzle the authorities. His chance would have been better had he gone alone, they argued. A companion like Ellerton could but embarrass so crafty a customer—such a regular top-sawyer in his profession—as Blades. Ruses that he could carry out singlehanded would be impracticable in the company of such a neophyte as Maurice. It must have been simply because he happened to occupy the next cell, they thought. Experience told them that these men seldom made up their minds to embark in such enterprises by themselves. There was an instinctive craving for an associate, as a rule, in such hazardous experiments.

Now there were two things which, fortunately for the fugitives, had not as yet occurred to those who ruled over the prison. First, that Blades might have been heavily bribed to assist Maurice Ellerton's escape. Secondly, that the two should separate the minute they found themselves outside. Both of these cases were contrary to all experience. The first may be briefly dismissed by saying that it was not very often a prisoner possessed the capability of bribing; and, if he did, it would be very problematical his finding an instrument so ready to his hand as Blades. Again, prisoners that had accomplished breaking out invariably hung together. Hunted men usually do, unless they have either preconcerted plans, or known refuges to make for. Fugitives from Portland were usually like foxes in a strange country, and the same fate commonly attended both—a dodging run, and then they were chopped; or, to speak less figuratively, after a few days perilous hide and seek, they were recaptured.

Nothing was heard of the refugees this first day, but Portland prison was not much surprised at that. When some of their children, in erring moments, fled to the outside world, they knew that such usually kept wondrous close to their hiding-places all the succeeding day. But they were bound to issue forth at night, either for food, to endeavour to get off the island, or from very weariness. It requires a good deal of strength of mind to keep your bed when perfectly well for two or three consecutive days, even when that bed is of the easiest, and surrounded with

every comfort. But when that bed may be a crevice in the rocks, a hen-roost, or some mouldy rubbish in tumble-down outhouse, when there is not so much as a drink of water within reach, little wonder that the luckless fugitives issue from their lairs at nightfall, like the wild beasts, and hunt for prey.

Man must eat or die. True, he often does the latter from excess of the former. Sometimes he does both; and, alas! not occasionally, but too often, he lays down his life after weary experiment of months as to how little aliment the vital spark can be kept alive on.

Now Mr. Blades was by no means the sort of man to submit himself to undue privation. He was not all afraid that he should lack for victual and drink when once darkness had descended on the island. There was any number of habitations in which those necessities might be found, lying all around ready to his burglarious hands. He rather chuckled in anticipation of what he called "looking into" two or three houses after midnight. He still retained his knife, a nail, the gimlet, and the chisel. "And I don't suppose," muttered Mr. Blades to himself, "that as the prison couldn't keep me in, there's anything on this island can keep me out with that bunch of keys."

Like Maurice, he found the day wearisome; but then Blades was not unaccustomed to such dreary concealment. He had lain hidden many a time in like manner, when the police had been hot upon his track, or when occasion had required him to stick close to some coign of vantage that he had attained, with a view to the consummation of some audacious robbery. As far as food went, he was no better off than the companion of his flight; but then, again, he rejoiced in the possession of a couple of sticks of tobacco. Mr. Blades wore away the day by sleeping, chewing, and listening to the prison bell. That sagacious gentleman, in truth, was lying *perdu* not many yards from that outside wall he had escaped over.

Great would have been the astonishment of the Reverend Robert Carmichael, Roman Catholic chaplain to the prison, and priest of the little chapel of that denomination close by, could he have seen into that chapel a couple of hours after sundown. From behind the altar cautiously peered

the head of Mr. Blades. It was too dusk for him to see much, though his eyes had been gradually accustomed to the waning light, but he listened attentively for some minutes. At length he seemed satisfied that he was sole tenant of the building. He struck a match, and lighting a small bit of candle, once more peered around him. "Now," said Mr. Blades, suavely addressing himself to the empty pews with as much solemnity as if they had been filled by a congregation all interested in his welfare, "the first thing I want is clothes. I can't expose the deplorable bad taste of government by going about in such a 'get up' as this a moment longer than is absolutely necessary. To a quiet man like myself such an obtrusive dress is positively repulsive. I prefer to mix with my fellows unnoticed, unknown. It may be I am at the top of my profession, but I don't condescend to advertise," and here the rascal stopped to chuckle at his own joke.

Mr. Blades could hold his tongue in case of necessity, but his passion for talk and his vanity were excessive. They were engrained in the man, and the former weakness had more than once been the cause of his undoing. He could keep silent enough until the outcry raised at one of his skilfully-planned and audacious robberies had subsided; but that over, for the life of him he could not resist bragging to his friends of the exploit. Mr. Blades had more than once experienced the fallacy of that most fallacious of all maxims, "Honour amongst thieves." The scum of the earth are ever ready to save their own skins at the expense of their comrades—to realize money by treachery as well as by robbery.

But the indomitable Blades was a man of business. Food, drink, and a change of raiment, he conceived it was essential that he should have before this night was over, and the last quite as much a necessity as the other two. It was useless to think of getting off the island till he had rid himself of his prison garb. It was too early as yet, by some hours, to venture without the chapel, but he might make some researches within.

"Bless 'em!" he muttered, as he prowled round the pews, "if they did but leave their great-coats instead of their prayer-books, what a fit out I should have to-night!"

I wonder, if a man was a great tailor, whether he could make a pair of trousers out of these here straw hassocks? It's a cut above me, though I have a needle and thread. They'd be remarkable, too, turned into pantaloons, I fancy, and I want something quiet. Ah! this is the vestry; let's see what there is here. Hum!" he continued, after a careful survey, "nothing but this old cassock! I might do something with that; best leave it, though, for the present, till I see if I can't do better outside. It'd hardly make up fashionable," quoth the burglar, with a grin; and then, his investigations being concluded, Mr. Blades retreated to his old lair behind the altar, blew out his candle, and betook himself to sleep or his own ruminations till the prison clock should clang the hour of midnight.

It may seem odd that Blades should have sought such a refuge as this, but it was no accident. For some days before the escape that worthy, in the solitude of his cell, had cogitated much upon where he should take shelter, that escape once satisfactorily accomplished.

"It must be somewheres near at hand," quoth Mr. Blades to himself. "It must be a place the most unlikely to think of. The nearer it is to the prison the more reason there will be for not suspecting it."

And one morning, when his work happened to take Mr. Blades into the western quarries for a little, the sun's rays fell upon the yellow glass in the eastern window of the chapel. The peculiar glitter attracted the burglar's eye. He didn't say "Eureka," not having had the advantage of a classical education, but exclaimed softly to himself, "That'll do—that's the place. Good clumsy old lock, that'll turn to a wire or a nail as easy as to its own key, no doubt, supposing the door is locked. They'll never hit that off." And from that moment Mr. Blades' mind was made up as to what should be his temporary haven.

But twelve o'clock strikes at last, very much to Mr. Blades' satisfaction. He has been counting the chimes very wearily for the last three hours. He is a-hungred, athirst, and his soul is impatient for action. At last the time has come, he thinks, when he may start, with some

safety, upon a marauding excursion. He is perfectly aware that patrols are likely to be about in quest of him. He knows very well that the picket on Chesil Beach will be kept up for some two or three nights yet, at least; but all this troubles him little. He has no intention of doing more than providing himself with a few essentials, and makes a pretty accurate guess when he imagines that the patrols will seek him further afield.

He lets himself quietly out of the chapel door, and steals into the darkness. He has no intention of going far. The first dwelling that looks like satisfying his requirements will serve his turn. He bends his steps towards the prison. His idea is to break into one of the houses inhabited by the officers of the establishment. He does not think this will be difficult. He has managed, somehow, to ascertain that these functionaries keep tolerably early hours. He calculates upon having little difficulty about getting into a ground-floor, and the probability of the inmates all sleeping above. Mr. Blades' knowledge of human nature tells him that men are always insensible to risk from what they are most familiar with; that an artilleryman, if allowed, would as soon smoke in a powder-magazine as anywhere else; that a sailor never dreams of providing himself with a life-belt; that a constable never locks his doors. Consequently, he argues, gentlemen in charge of a prison would be the last people in the world to indulge in any superfluity of bolts and bars.

Another thing, too, and by no means the least attractive in this scheme, was the devilment of it. It tickled Blades' vanity mightily. How it would be talked of in the prison if the Governor's or the Deputy-Governor's house should be broken into! Notoriety was to the burglar as the breath of his nostrils; and then he really did look upon it that he should run as little risk there, and as good a chance of finding what he needed, as in any place. Again, these domiciles were not above four hundred yards or so distant from his sanctuary, and Mr. Blades deems them an essential.

He creeps cautiously along across small fields and gardens lying parallel to the road, intent upon his purpose, when a light suddenly arrests his attention. It is a low,

flickering light, and proceeds apparently from a house lying some thirty yards to his left. Not the light of a candle, he thinks,—looks more like the expiring embers of a fire. Mr. Blades considers this worthy of investigation. He scrambles over a low wall, and finds himself in a stable-yard. The light proceeds from a ground-floor window looking into that yard. Mr. Blades walks gently up to the building, and peeps in. It is a sight full of temptation to a hungry man. He is looking into a comfortable kitchen. The remnant of a good fire still sparkles in the grate, while on the table is the *débris* of an excellent supper—cold meat, bread, cheese, etc. “No use going further,” muses Mr. Blades, “it would be a clear tempting of Providence.” He tries the window; it is bolted. Not much difficulty, he thinks, to take out a pane, and so let himself in, if he had but the tools, but he hasn’t. You want a diamond to cut out a pane of glass with, a sheet of brown paper, and a little mucilage, to insure its not falling in and making a noise. Mr. Blades is not provided with these necessities of his art. He tries the door; it is locked, but not bolted. He examines the lock carefully. Very common-place arrangement that, he thinks, and to be forced in something like three or four minutes.

But Mr. Blades is in no hurry. He is not going to thrust his head into a trap. Before he commences operations he must go all round the house, and ascertain that there is no other light to be discovered. From what he has seen he augurs that the whole family have gone to bed, but it is as well to be on the safe side. He goes round to the front, and ventures into the road, not without much listening, and peering into the darkness. He finds himself in front of the “Clifton Arms,” a small inn nearly opposite the prison. No sign of any one astir, that he can make out. No candle’s flickering light gleams from the windows, not a sound but the wailing of the wind and the plashing of the rain is to be heard. “It’ll do,” mutters the burglar. “It’s a cursed night to be out in, and one can’t afford to be particular. Besides,” he continued, with a grin, “I can look up the Governor to-morrow.”

He stole round to the back, and in five minutes had

forced the lock, and was warming himself at the kitchen fire. Then he seated himself at the table, and ate ravenously. But "good eating requires good drinking," saith the old adage, and Mr. Blades was not the man to set his face against an ancient saw of that description.

"Seems as if they'd laid it all out a-purpose for me," muttered the burglar, at the conclusion of his repast, "and a very tidy little feed it were; but they have clean forgot the fluids. Never mind; I'm an easy-going chap. It'd be a pity to ring 'em up at this time of night. I'll just take a look round for myself."

So saying, Mr. Blades slipped off his boots, took a candle, and commenced his researches. "The bar's what I want," he thought, and in pursuance of this idea he made his way softly to the front of the house. The window looking into the entrance passage soon indicated to him which room served that purpose. It was locked, as might have been expected, but that proved a very temporary impediment to Mr. Blades, and he was soon within it. "Shows a want of confidence in your fellow-creatures, this here," he muttered, shaking his head over the locked beer-engine. "Well, well, it's a wicked world, and mankind is weak as regards beer. Ah! this'll do," he continued, seizing a bottle. "My worthy host, you had best remember in future that men are perhaps equally frail as regards brandy and"—here he took another bottle—"gin."

Thus armed, Mr. Blades returned to the kitchen, and there tossed off a pretty stiff dose of spirits to the health of his unconscious entertainer.

"Most hospitable people," he remarked to himself, genially, as he stood with his back to the fire; the Governor himself couldn't have done the thing more handsomely. Now, my jolly host, I know just what you'd say if I'd knocked you up; and when you thoroughly understand people, it's a pity to trouble them unnecessarily, ain't it? 'Blades, my boy,' you'd say, 'you'll take a sandwich to put in your pocket; there's nothing like being independent, and able to take your snack at your own time.'"

Acting upon which observation, Mr. Blades packed the remains of the bread and meat and the two bottles of

spirits up neatly in a jack-towel, which he discovered behind the door.

“ ‘Now,’ says you again,” continued the burglar, apostrophising the unconscious landlord, “ ‘Blades, old fellow, ’tis a desparate night! If you look round that passage, you’ll maybe find a top-coat of some kind. You’d best just slip into it. ’Twould be a pity to spoil those fashionable clothes of yours.’ ” And with an indescribable wink in recognition of his own humour, Mr. Blades stepped out to make some search for garments.

“ This here’s the lot,” he observed, on his return to the kitchen, after an absence of some few minutes, throwing on to the table a bundle of clothes which he bore on his arm. “ Item first—a bonnet. Bless you, as if you weren’t too attractive as it is! There’d be no passing any one if you got that on your head! Item second—a seedy overcoat. Well, the owner wants a new one, if he has to go tick for it; it’ll be a charity to put this out of his way. What’s this?—a shawl? Now, the question is, whether there’s a pair of trousers to be got out of that. It’s more promising than hassocks,” said Mr. Blades, meditatively; “but I doubt it’s scanty. I’m afraid bathing-drawers is about the outside it would come to. An apron and a petticoat—how the girls do leave their things about! They’re careless cattle, women are, except about their best clothes. And this old hat finishes the lot. Well, it ain’t a handsome tile, and it don’t fit to within a size or two. It wouldn’t be worth while carrying an umbrella to save it; and nobody’s likely to borrow money from you while you wear it; and, dash it, I’m a capitalist—I am just now. I forgot that!”

And here Mr. Blades lapsed into deep meditation upon the sum of money that was awaiting him at the “Cock and Compasses,” in Charles Street, Drury Lane, and the varied delights of the metropolis. Rousing himself from his reverie at last, he suddenly exclaimed:

“Come, this won’t do! It’s getting time for all respectable parties to be in bed—especially moneyed parties like me.”

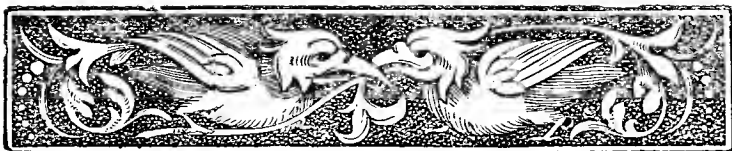
And Mr. Blades proceeded forthwith to invest himself in the overcoat, placed the much-disparaged hat upon his

head, took up his bundle, and waving his hand airily towards the ceiling, in recognition of his sleeping host, once more plunged out into the darkness.

He made his way back to the chapel without molestation, and as he once more stretched himself in his lair with the spoils of the evening by his side, the prison clock struck four.

“A very tidy night’s work,” he murmured; “but time ’ll pass plaguy slow to-morrow, unless I hit upon something to wile it away with. However, I’ve plenty to eat and drink, and that’s an improvement on yesterday.”





CHAPTER XXXIV.

MR. BLADES' ADVENTURE.

FORTIFIED with food and strong waters, Mr. Blades slept away the hours with peaceful unconsciousness, till gradually the sound of voices stole upon his ear. So gradually, indeed, that he was aware of them for some few minutes before he actually awoke. He raised his head and listened. Then he speedily recognised that service was going on in the chapel; that, from the steps of that altar behind which he lay concealed, the priest was at that moment celebrating matins. This was a thing that Mr. Blades imperfectly comprehended. It was very rarely that worthy went to a church, except when in prison. Then the powers that were took care that he should attend divine service twice every Sunday. But weekly services were a thing outside his experience, much more daily ones. The previous morning, fatigued from the work consequent on his escape, he had slept soundly through the ceremony, but now he was alive to it. Mr. Blades felt no little perturbed at this discovery. He had thought that nobody ever entered a church except upon Sundays, and so had conceived him self perfectly safe from intrusion for the next three days — this being a Thursday. Of course it was quite patent to him that he could do nothing but lie still, and trust that nothing would lead any one to come behind the altar.

He was, in truth, tolerably safe. It was rarely, except for the purposes of cleaning, that any one entered that

narrow space between the back of the altar and the exterior wall in which he now lay hidden. A few moments more, and the voice of the officiating priest was hushed. A slight rustling of petticoats, a pattering of feet, and the scanty congregation, composed chiefly of women, dispersed. Blades, listening with ears preternaturally sharpened, follows all this; he detects even the footfall of the priest as, with slow, deliberate step, he follows those few devotees to the door—another moment, and he hears the latter close with sonorous slam. Still the burglar listens attentively. At length he feels satisfied that he is alone, and cautiously peeps round the altar to make assurance doubly sure. One of Mr. Blades' maxims on such occasions is that, no matter what you believe, you should always act as if you knew nothing about it; that, whatever you may think as to your security, you should still neglect no precaution that lies within your power. Metaphorically, he would have explained his views in this wise—"If you break into an empty house, always work as if there were a couple of detectives asleep on the first floor."

His survey being satisfactory, Mr. Blades emerges from his lair, and wonders a good deal whereabouts in the day he may have got to. He has no idea as to what time it is, and considers that a subject on which it is a necessity that he should be informed. Utterly ignorant as regards the forms of the Roman Catholic church, the service he has just overheard gives him no clue whatever to the hour—whether it is morning or afternoon he knows not. He climbs up into the gallery and looks out.

The wind has fallen considerably. It is one of those wild misty November days that never seem to achieve thorough daylight; as if the sun had never summoned courage really to get up, but had slunk back to bed again, and altogether ignored his duty to the world—disgusted, perchance, with the meanness, frivolity, and petty bickerings that it is his daily lot to look down upon; sick of contemplating this swarming, squabbling, struggling ant-hill of an earth. A day that never arrives at more than haze—such a day as in London you begin by gaslight, and feel only anxious to return to gaslight as soon as

decency allows. But London, on such occasions, always thinks it right for some three or four hours to consider that there is no necessity for gas, whatever may be the consistency of the fog. Mr. Blades, looking over the West Quarries through the yellow glass of the chapel window, is more puzzled than ever as regards the time.

For some minutes he can make out nothing. There is a yellow haze, in which even the passers-by on the road immediately beneath him loom indistinct. Gradually his eyes get more accustomed to the light, and he can distinguish his late co-mates at work in the West Quarry. This rather tickles Mr. Blades. There is something that titillates his risible faculties in contemplating his late fellows at their customary toil; in looking on at their dire struggle with the rock, in witnessing their painful labour with pick and hammer, shovel and barrow, as they slowly wrench the reluctant stone from its bed. For Portland yields not her wealth readily or easily, and those magnificent blocks we see are won from her only by many a weary stroke of the workman's hands.

"Ha, ha!" chuckled Mr. Blades. "I think about the hardest time I ever had was when I first came here, and was set upon that job. How I did hate the barrow business! I've pitied the costermonger chaps ever since, as earns their miserable living in that way. It's about the most sickening thing I ever put my hand to, is running a barrow to and fro all day." And then Mr. Blades' face became a little overcast, as it occurred to him that, in case of his recapture, he would probably revert to that occupation. He knew that in such an event the privilege of working in the blacksmith's shop would assuredly be no longer his.

He shook his head moodily, and descending from the gallery, once more sought his lair behind the altar. Comforting himself with a dram, as a preliminary, he proceeded to take stock of his last night's plunder. "Plenty of food and liquor," he muttered; "no need to go foraging for them to-night. It's clothes I want, especially the unmentionables, this old coat and hat are a help, but I must

have a regular good rig somehow. The natives in these parts take a good deal of notice of dress ;" and Mr. Blades winked pleasantly on an imaginary audience, " I wonder," he continued, " if there's a pair of leggings to be had out of this shawl. Here the burgular shook out the garment in question, and looked at it meditatively. It was a grey woollen shawl, and apparently he came to the conclusion there was, for producing a housewife and a small pair of scissors from his pockets, Mr. Blades sat down and devoted himself seriously for a while to tailoring. It cannot be said that his labours were exactly successful, taken in the light of leggings ; but, nevertheless, in about an hour and a half he succeeded in producing a pair of nondescripts, of the species that at all events served to hide those terrible tell-tale blue and red-hooped stockings of the prison. Mr. Blades' personal appearance was far from prepossessing, as he once more emerged from behind the altar ; and he himself was perfectly aware of the fact. He was attired in the old great-coat he had confiscated the night before, which was some couple of sizes too small for him ; in the hat, which was at least one too big for him, and which he had stuffed with the shreds of the shawl, to enable him to wear it ; while his nether man was shrouded in those last efforts of his master-hand.

" Well," he said, grinning, " this is the first stage to developing into the butterfly of fashion. I ain't a convict this time, and that's something. Expect I look a little as if I were in a promising way to become one. Drat your impudence !" he continued, once more addressing that imaginary audience to whom, in default of real hearers, he was so fond of appealing, " do you suppose every gentleman who looks a little out-at-elbows is on his way to ' the quarries ? ' Dash my buttons (I'd have found half-a-dozen come handy just now, by the way) ! but your capitalists are always bad dressers, especially as regards hats. Why, I'm in a position to command ' a special ' for town this minute, if I wasn't of a retiring disposition. Two hundred pounds lying at my banker's in London, at this identical moment ! But I hates vulgar ostentation, I do and third-class and no fuss is what suits my complaint. "

Mr. Blades once more ascended to the gallery, and looked out upon the scene of his former toil. It was deserted, the prisoners having been marched home to dinner. Now, as before said, Mr. Blades was considerably puzzled as to whereabouts in the day he had arrived. He had failed, in the earnest exercise of his tailoring, to take note of the prison clock, of which, had he paid attention, he was within hearing. But he was very weary of his confinement in the chapel. What is the use of having attained liberty if you cannot make use of it? In his eagerness to be up and doing, the burglar took an erroneous view of the deserted state of the quarries, and came to the conclusion that work was over for that day. It was, bear in mind, one of those misty November days on which it is so difficult from the light to fix the hour at all.

"It will be dark," argued Mr. Blades, "in something like forty minutes. There's just a thing or two I should like to see before it is. I don't think I run much risk in this get-up; anyhow, I must run some, if I'm ever to get away from this blessed 'isle of beauty,' and sing 'fare thee well,' as the song says. I shall take a little walk."

Cautiously did the burglar raise the latch and steal out of the chapel. In a few minutes, having encountered, luckily, no one in the road, he had jumped over a low stone wall, and was making his way across country towards the "free labour quarries,"* which overlook Chesiltown and the West Bay. Mr. Blades had some knowledge of the island, and wished to ascertain if one of his schemes for ultimate escape was feasible. He knew that, if he could lie *perdu* for another three nights, the picket on Chesil Beach would probably be withdrawn. He thought that then it would be quite practicable, at night, to descend the steep but by no means impossible descent that runs from these "free labour quarries" into Chesiltown, and so make his way along the shore in the direction of Brid-

* The reader must understand that there are several quarries in Portland worked by free labour, in addition to the two (the East and West) worked by the prisoners.

port; but, like a general of discretion, Blades deemed it would be as well to reconnoitre a little, in the first place.

He had not proceeded far before he noticed, with some anxiety, that it apparently got lighter instead of darker. Still he pushed on, but soon it became obvious to him that the day was lifting, and that he must have made a grievous mistake regarding the hour. What was to be done? The burglar thought that he ran probably more risk in turning back than he should do if he persevered. His mind was at once made up; decision was one of Mr. Blades' gifts. Forward it should be; and, could he but gain the quarries, he thought he might safely conceal himself there until the daylight waned.

Blades' idea was by no means devoid of sound reasoning. In these free labour quarries the number of workmen employed are few compared with those belonging to the government. It would be easy to avoid the part where the men were actually at work, and it is seldom, at all events in November, that people trouble themselves to clamber about amongst broken stony places. In the summer time it is different; then there is no saying where roving geologist or irrepressible "tripper" (Portland slang for the excursion train, or rather perhaps steamer, folks) will not penetrate. Both "the tripper" and the geologist have a hankering after strange caves, corners, and crevices.

But, unfortunately for the astute Blades, there lived in Chesiltown, at the bottom of this very cliff that he ultimately contemplated descending, a gaunt, tough old coast-guard, who daily or nightly, as the case might be, scaled it, to attend to his professional duties on the heights above. This weather-beaten old mariner attained the summit, with a view to relieving his comrade along the West Cliff, just as Blades reached the shelter of the quarries on the opposite side, and the quick eye of the sailor immediately fell upon the skulking fugitive. A man seeking to avoid notice is generally transparent to the glance of the casual observer. He is apt to remind one of a dog that has been in mischief. There is the same slinking, slouching demeanour to be seen both in quadruped and biped; the same shy

furtive gaze. To those accustomed to deal with iniquitous practitioners, nothing is so palpable. The policeman of twelve months' training cannot overlook the man who shrinks from being noticed.

The old coast-guard was as yet too far off to scrutinize Blades at all narrowly. He could take no account of his dress or of his look. But he did at once come to the conclusion that this man wished to avoid notice, and that therefore it was his duty to look after him, and see what he might be. He knew, moreover, that two prisoners "were out," and at such times Portland generally is more alive to mysterious strangers than usual.

Blades, intent upon evading the observation of the workmen, with eyes like a startled hare thrown continually over his shoulder, did not at first perceive that he was watched. But as he entered the broken ground of the quarries, he turned his restless gaze in every direction, and then it flashed across him in an instant that the immoveable figure on the crest of the steep was regarding him with considerable interest. The burglar's decision was taken at once. Crouching behind a large block of stone, he placed his hat on a smaller boulder to the right, and then creeping round the left of this protecting screen, cautiously peeped out. The man on the crest of the hill is in motion now, and coming his way. Mr. Blades recovers his hat and retires, but not exactly in the direction he has come. If a hue and cry is to be raised, he argues that he cannot afford to be hunted across the open in the direction of the prison. His pursuers would then probably run him into the arms of the warders, whose attention their shouts would have aroused. No! he holds off towards the West Cliff, and walks sharply towards another quarry that lies to the south of the one he has just quitted. This is turning his back upon the ground he set forth to investigate, but the burglar considers that further reconnoitring is fraught with danger to himself.

So dexterously does he skulk along in this new direction that it is not till he emerges from the broken ground considerably to his right now, that the coastguard again catches sight of him. The latter had been making his way steadily to where he had last seen the hat, impressed

with the idea that the owner thereof would be found in that vicinity. "Why, there's the fellow again," he muttered, "stealing off on a new tack. I'll just have one look at him through the glass." And, suiting the action to the word, he unslung his telescope, and indulged in one steady glance at the rapidly retiring Blades.

"That's enough!" he exclaimed, as he closed his glass. "He goes about directly he's sighted. That chap's papers won't bear overhauling, I'll wager a can of grog. I'll bring him too, though, blessed if I won't!" And the coastguard strode rapidly in pursuit.

Blades, in his retreat, had to pass considerably nearer than he liked to the men working in the quarry; but intent upon their labour, they took no notice of him. His pursuer, in his turn, also passed them closely, and hesitated for a moment whether he should not call some of them to his assistance. But then he bethought him that, if it should prove to be one of the escaped convicts, he should have to divide the five-pound reward for the capture with these assistants. Jim Fleming shook his head. He feared neither man nor devil. Five pounds was a sum that brooked no dividing; besides, had he not his cutlass? Could he not hold his own with any man? No, win or lose, it should be a single-handed job this; and Fleming pushed on now in earnest pursuit.

Blades had forbore from looking back until he had passed the quarry men; he had also feared to attract attention by passing them too rapidly. But once clear of them, he glanced back, and perceiving that he was being evidently followed, he stepped out to the utmost of his ability. Another glance over his shoulder—a few seconds later—showed him that his pursuer's legs were longer than his own. Though both as yet had confined themselves to walking, he saw clearly the distance between them was rapidly diminishing. The shelter he sought was still a good half-mile in front of him, and concealment there impossible, unless he could reach it considerably in advance of his pursuer. Mr. Blades decided that he must run for it, and somewhat ruefully reflected that he had never been distinguished for extraordinary pace in that exercise. He casts one more glance over his shoulder. The coast-guard

is striding along, as if invested with seven-league boots. "He can walk, and no mistake," thought Blades. "My only chance is that he can't run, so here goes." And the burglar fairly took to his heels.

Jim Fleming had no doubt about it now, and followed suit at once. But Blades had accidentally made a hit in this instance. It was not that the coastguard was not quite as good a runner, if not better than the fugitive, but he was hampered with his waterproof, telescope, and cutlass. All these things had not much impeded his walking powers, but they did tell against him considerably when it came to running. If the burglar did not get much the best of it, he certainly more than held his own. But then, on the other hand, there was a stone wall or two to be got over, and that was in favour of the pursuer, for he who leads on such occasions has to pick the place that is most easily practicable, which will at times involve a second or so's delay, whilst he who follows has clearly nothing to do but follow. And so it came about that Blades reached his haven of refuge not a couple of hundred yards in advance of his adversary after all. Now that affords scant time for a man pretty well blown and unacquainted with the ground to look out for himself a hiding-place. The fates seemed against Blades, for though there were doubtless many crevices and crannies in the quarry suitable for his purpose, he was unable to hit one off.

Fleming lost sight of the fugitive as he disappeared in the quarry, but the cunning coast-guard nevertheless held on at the best pace he could compass, until he reached it; then, scrambling on to the top of one of the highest stones, he paused to take breath and reconnoitre. Two or three minutes, and then he again caught sight of his prey, this time little more than fifty yards away from him. It was injudicious, but he could not resist a cheer. In an instant Blades, abandoning all idea of concealment, was scrambling through the stones once more in flight, and again the coast-guard toiled forward in pursuit. It was floundering work for both—more than once pursuer and pursued came headlong to the ground; but Fleming through it all was never "unsighted," to use a phrase of the coursing field. Still his impedimenta put him at a disadvantage; and

when Blades emerged at the other end of the quarry, it was pretty nearly a hundred yards in advance of his pertinacious enemy. But where was he now to make for? To his left were St. George's Church and the village of Reforne; on his right the perpendicular cliffs of the West Bay; no escape on either side. His sole chance was to speed along the edge of the cliff towards Blacknor Point and the Bill, trusting to wear down his pursuer, and meet no person on that unfrequented path. There was scant time for decision. Barely a second, and Blades sped rapidly down the rough pathway that borders the precipitous west side of the island.

"I have him now!" was Jim Fleming's exulting exclamation, as he saw the direction the fugitive had taken. "Nothing to do but to stick to him, and my mates about the lighthouse will nab him sartain." But ere he started once more in pursuit, he mechanically threw a glance seaward. "Beat, by gosh!" he muttered—"here's the cursed fog rolling up again forty knots an hour! If I don't run into him this side Blacknor Point, I'll never see him again to-night, not if I was within ten yards of him." And once more Jim Fleming dashed off at his best speed. But before he had gone a quarter of a mile, he slackened his pace. He had lost sight of Blades round an angle of the cliff, and the fog now closed in so rapidly that already he could barely see a hundred yards in front of him. Another five minutes, and he knew well that he would be hardly able to distinguish the figure of a man at a third of that distance. Further pursuit was hopeless, though that he had been hot on the trail of one of the escaped prisoners, Fleming felt certain.

"It's tough," he muttered, as he retraced his steps to relieve his comrade, who had been anxiously on the look-out for the last half-hour. "Here's a fi'-pun note almost in a chap's hand, and you come and spoil sport."

And the coast-guard shook his fist fiercely at the heavy vapour that now surrounded him.

Mr. Blades, like Paris—that *mauvais sujet* of the Iliad—owed his safety to the Goddess of the Foam. Had it not been for the fog that had rolled suddenly up from

the sea—no unusual thing at Portland—his capture was imminent. As it is, he is left in a sufficiently unpleasant predicament; far from his sanctuary, and utterly unable to find his way thither for the present; there is nothing left for him but to creep into the nearest crevice he can find, and wait patiently till the mist shall lift.





CHAPTER XXXV.

WEARILY WAITING.

MAURICE ELLERTON, in the ruined barn at Southwell, finds the hours wear tediously away. When he first peeped out and saw the heavy sea-fog and little else, he knew that he was destined to trust to his present shelter for another night. He chafes impetuously at this; he is so impatient to find that he is veritably free. At present he is much like a mouse that the cat is playing with. She lets it go; half-crippled with wounds and fright, it steals nervously away! but, just as it deems itself safe, whish! and the cruel claws are in it again. Portland treats her truants in like feline fashion. A few days skulking among rocks and out-buildings, and then the gates of the prison once more snap upon them.

Portland has been rather amused at the audacity of Mr. Blades. The robbery at the "Clifton Arms" has been most properly attributed to him; that he would naturally seize what his requirements demanded was only what Portland expected of him, but that he should select a house just opposite to the prison to commence with, did tickle Portland immensely. "Drat his impudence!" said one of the warders, reputed a wag among the fraternity, "he's broke out, and, if we ain't very careful, we shall have him breaking in again;" a joke that caused his companions to indulge in much chuckling and laughter. But Portland had no doubt that the fugitives would be back within the toils ere many days were over—none whatever.

The only thing that did surprise Portland was that Maurice Ellerton had not already led to the re-capture of the two—for that they were together Portland never doubted—and they deemed such a neophyte in crime as Ellerton would most assuredly soon lay himself open to detection.

“T’others’s packed him up in cotton-wool while he goes out to do the catching,” quoth the jester. “You won’t hear of Ellerton till we see Blades, then he’ll come in like a lamb as has lost its mother.”

Maurice Ellerton paces up and down his barn this dreary day somewhat sadly. He has cleared away some of the scattered lumber, so as to make a space in which to take exercise. The employment did him good. Is anything more *triste* than to sit with folded hands and meditate upon one’s backslidings? Better anything than that. Repent of past folly, an you be wise, and try and amend your ways. But sooner commit more folly than look back with folded arms, over the sins of by-gone days. Stagnant remorse is perpetual torture. There is more hope for him who still lingers in the whirlpool of vice.

The exercise was necessary to Maurice. If they did not keep roaring fires in the prison, yet the Halls were sufficiently warmed. Besides, the labour conduced to make the blood course quickly through the veins. Here the chill, vaporous atmosphere penetrated his very marrow; and he tramped up and down the little passage he had formed, if only to warm himself. But, it was not altogether that. Maurice, in his present restless state, felt unable to remain quiet. He looked forward impatiently to the return of his visitor of last night. What a load her kindly farewell had taken from his breast! He pondered often over the fact that a woman whose face was voucher for her purity, had not disdained to recognise the convict. There was a chance for him, then, yet! If he could but escape from this accursed island, he might begin life again. But where? To what foreign land should he betake himself? Then he commenced to reckon up his acquirements—to take stock of what capital of brains he had, with which to recommence a career. He found, as men of his class too often do, that it would be hard to say exactly

what he was fitted for. Well, he supposed he might find employment as a clerk or a book-keeper. There was bread and cheese to be earned in these capacities, at all events. Maurice is inclined to be very humble as regards his future life, at present.

Suddenly it occurs to him that the day is lightening. He scrambles up to the window, and sees the fog gradually disappearing. His heart bounds within him. To-night, then, he will be free! There is hardly a breath of wind. It never crosses his mind that, while a gale precludes his brother putting out to his rescue, a calm will make it equally impossible. He is too excited to reason; one of those impressionable beings who pass rapidly from the depths of despair to the heights of exultation—who grovel in the dust to-day, and sing pæans on the morrow—such is Maurice Ellerton's temperament. It was but yesterday, and he mused over suicide, and was stung with remorse at the evil he had wrought upon all those dearest to him. To-day, he is filled with hope of commencing a new life. It is not that his sin is forgotten; but, for the present, the recollection thereof lies dormant. Should his future career be far more prosperous than he has dared to anticipate, the memory of his crime will haunt this man to his dying day. He will never be able to put it away from him. It will come to him in the night watches, even should things prosper with him, and the past disgrace be felt keenly, as of yore. He is no hardened offender. He has fallen—he has bitterly repented. And yet, in the exhilaration of leaving the scene of his punishment, he is momentarily oblivious of the crime that led to it.

But ere a couple of hours have passed, Maurice's spirits begin to fall. The fog that had lifted temporarily, begins once more to envelope the island; and Maurice, descending from the window, is compelled to admit that there can be no chance of escape for him to-night. Ruefully he throws himself upon his heap of straw. A little more, and he is once more left with the rats and the darkness. How the former gibber and squeal! he thinks, like so many evil spirits! Once more he conjures up their fell red eyes and gleaming teeth. It is imagination, of course, for he cannot see them. But the re-action is setting in, and Maurice

is beginning to view things from the other side of his character. He is somewhat cold—somewhat hungry; yet by no means in the exhausted state he had been in on the previous night. But he is disappointed. He had thought his freedom was to be a reality before the sun should rise again. Disappointment, to men of his type, in grave matters, is always crushing; they sink rapidly to the depths of despondency. Maurice Ellerton is once more lapsing into the suicidal state, and reflecting that it were better for himself and his relations that he were dead.

He lies there, miserable, conscience-stricken, listening to the continuous gnawing and squeaking of the rats, as upon the previous night. He wonders what it is that attracts them to this deserted barn—what can they find here to gnaw or quarrel over? He fancies they are more numerous than yesterday, that they approach his straw more closely. It is probable they do. There is the *débris* of his provisions on the floor, and those rats, the chances are, find a living hard to come by. Once more he is haunted with the idea that the rats know instinctively he is doomed to perish there; that they come like legacy-hunters to see about his health, or, like undertakers, to inquire about how near he may be to his funeral. He cannot divest himself of these ideas.

Suddenly the snick of the latch catches his ears, and he springs quickly to his feet. He hears the rustle of female garments. It is his visitor of last night. He has looked forward much to seeing her again. He can hear the scraping of the lucifer; anxiously does he await the lighting of her little lantern. Even by the flash of the match he knows that he is mistaken; this is not the tall and graceful figure of yesterday. She turns the light full on him. He recognizes the girl who conducted him hither from Rufus's Castle. Once more he is disappointed.

"I have brought you some supper," she said, at last, producing a little basket from under her cloak. "Of course you know there's no chance of the schooner standing into the West Bay to-night. You'll just have to lie quiet here for another day or two. It'll be more roomy than the prison cells, I'm thinking."

Ah! he is catching a glimpse of the outside world again.

He seems destined to learn to-night how that world regards a man with the brand of Portland fresh upon him. No ministering angel of mercy this, but a girl of bitter, unscrupulous tongue, who succours him simply because she is well paid to do so. He pauses before he makes answer, Whatever the motive of Jennie, whether sheer womanly compassion, or some other unfathomable to him, she was as different from this girl as light from darkness. Small hope of sympathy from his present attendant. He looks keenly at her for a moment, and sees that she also regards him with considerable attention.

"I thank you," he exclaims, at length. "It is very good of you to come to my assistance."

"Spare your thanks," returned Nance, sharply. "It's from no good will of mine that I bring help to any of your name. I only obey the orders of one whose word is law to me. And it will be the death of her, poor dear, that she ever encountered that brother of yours! 'The Lady' has said it!"

"What lady? What do you mean?" inquired Maurice breathlessly.

"What would be the use of telling you?" retorted Nance, scornfully. "You know nothing about her, or her Well, in which you may read your fate, if you believe in her. I have warned Miss Jennie—I have threatened him. But it is no use," she continued, in a low voice. "What must be must. I have tried to separate them, and I can't. They will die—ay, die together, I think; but I can never see his face, it's always turned from me. If he does not die with her, I shall kill him. He must be coward to the backbone if he would live. You don't know how she loves him!"

Maurice stared aghast. What all this meant was simply incomprehensible to him. His sole idea was that the girl was mad; and in this he was not altogether wrong. Poor Nance was decidedly a little crazy. Monomaniacal on the subject of the 'Wishing Well' and "the Lady's" revelations, without doubt.

"I don't quite understand to whom you allude," he said soothingly. "I should be very sorry to work harm to the young lady, who was good enough to bring me food last night."

"No," replied Nance, "it isn't you. I would give you up to the prison folks to-morrow if I thought that you could work her harm;" and here the girl seated herself deliberately on a broken barrow, and turned the lantern full on Maurice's face.

His eyes fell before her wild scrutinizing gaze, and he busied himself with some of the food that she had brought him.

"Pleasant this," he muttered. "My safety depends upon a mad child's whimsies. Who can tell how soon she may take it into her head to make known, if not to the prison authorities, to some one else, my present hiding-place;" and it was with scant appetite that Maurice Ellerton commenced his meat. Whenever he raised his eyes, he encountered the steady gaze of his wild companion. It was hopeless, it was impossible to eat under such circumstances.

"What makes you look so hard at me? Is it because you know that I am an escaped prisoner?" he inquired at length.

"No," returned Nance sententiously.

"What is it, then?"

"Because I am curious to see what sort of stuff you are made of, whom so many folks are risking their liberty to set free. I don't know what you've done—I don't care; but when Miss Jennie chances as much as she has for you on anything, I like to see if it's worth it, if I can."

Maurice shrank from this girl's outspokenness. Instinctively he felt that he was weighed in the balance, and found wanting in her eyes; that she looked upon it that all these efforts to secure his safety had been lavished upon an unworthy object. Still this would never do—he could not consent to be browbeaten by a girl of sixteen.

"I don't quite understand why Miss Jennie has been good enough to take so much interest in my escape," he observed, after a considerable pause.

"What a fool you must be!" replied his *vis-à-vis* calmly, without relaxing her steady perusal of his features for a second.

"I don't see that," retorted Maurice hotly. "How can I, shut up in Portland as I have been, understand what

could make a woman like Miss Jennie interest herself about me?"

"Oh, you can wake up," said Nance coolly. "I'm glad of that. You might have said young lady though, while you were about it. Yes, I forgot you couldn't know. Well, she's going to marry your brother, and I suppose she didn't care about having a relation in the place there," and Nance jerked her head in the direction of the prison.

"Going to marry Dainty?" cried Maurice.

"Yes, going to marry Dainty, or whatever you call him," cried Nance, springing to her feet, her eyes flashing with jealous anger; "and he's not half good enough for her, nor is anybody else that I know of. And now I'm going—if there's anything you want particular you had better say so."

"I have all I want," replied Maurice.

"Then good night. You will see either Miss Jennie or me to-morrow evening; and it may be that the schooner will be able to make the West Bay. It should be fine after all this fog, if I know anything of Portland weather." And with that Nance extinguished her light and departed.

So his brother was engaged to marry the handsome girl who had come to him with food and drink last night. How he wondered who she could be. He half wished that he had questioned his late crazy visitor further on the subject. But perhaps, after all, it was only some wild notion of the mad girl's. Yet how came it that a woman like Miss Jennie had interested herself in his fate? Her betrothal to his brother would explain all which looked inexplicable. Maurice mused over this marriage for some time; then stretching himself on his straw, composed himself quietly to sleep.



CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE CAPTAIN'S SUSPICIONS.

CAPTAIN HOLDERSHED has been somewhat put out these last few days. He swears up and down the gamut in a way that makes the two maids shiver in their shoes, and pray ardently for the speedy return of Miss Jennie. He gives unbridled license to his taste for nor'-westers, and mixes his liquor and his language stronger daily. The Captain is profuse in muttered references to blank blank "popinjays," and the way they upset young women's understandings and the economy of households. Astounding are the sights he sees through that marvellous telescope at this time, and the dolorous account he gave of seeing a ship go down in the Race, from the summit of the hill above the "Wishing Well," quite affected his neighbours, until one of them happened to remember that the isle of Portland lay between that hill and the scene of the fatal accident. Then they attributed it all to his glass, but did not particularize which glass, simply exchanging sympathetic winks upon the subject.

Jennie, on returning from her visit to the Maid of the Mist, felt that it would be perfectly impossible to stop at Upway while the escape was being consummated. She told her uncle that she must go home to her own people for two or three days, and started for Portland that afternoon. There she soon found out Nance, and learned from her all that had occurred the previous night, and the

place of Maurice's present concealment. Her love for Dainty irresistibly impelled her to take some active part in what might be termed the conspiracy—hence her visit to Maurice the first evening that he passed in the barn.

Now the Captain always disliked his niece's absence. Of course Jennie did at times run over for a day or two to see her parents ; but such trips invariably disturbed the veteran greatly. He missed her bonnie face and merry laugh. Then it was weary work sitting down to a solitary dinner ; while he never could succeed in brewing his tea to his liking at breakfast. Even the nor'-westers were not so enjoyable as when imbibed after a skirmish with Jennie to obtain them. The day, too, is disagreeable, although the fog is nothing like so thick as that which envelops Portland. The Captain sits gloomily meditating over what Jennie had told him concerning her engagement. He does not like it, although it was not in his really kindly nature to do otherwise than congratulate her when she announced it to him. He had always mistrusted Dainty Ellerton, on those perfectly justifiable grounds upon which the epigrammatist registered his objection to Dr. Fell. It is all nonsense to say that we must have reasons for our antipathies. We have our instincts ; and how often women, who are usually more illogical than ourselves on such points, prove themselves right in trusting to such instinctive dislike. Besides, a most estimable person may be opposed to our very nature. We allege nothing against him, but we express our opinion that he is—well, let's say objectionable.

Now the Captain, wrapped in that fictitious mantle of worldly wisdom which he believes himself to possess, is moodily picturing Dainty as a transcendent villain, capable of going through all the formula of a mock marriage, etc. He will not believe that Dainty can mean honestly by his niece ; he conceives that there is a damnable conspiracy afoot, over which it behoves him to keep an eye.

“By heaven !” he mutters at last, “he had better mind how he treats Jennie ! If he doesn't mean to act right by her, he'll find that I'm not quite so old as he takes me

for, the popinjay ! If she could but have fancied that other, now ; he's a man that—leastways he will be, after a bit ; but I never knew any good come out of a chap who was so afraid of his hands getting sunburnt, and who shirked his liquor.

‘ For while the grog goes round,
All sense of danger drowned,
We despise it to a man, ’ ”

hummed the veteran.

Suddenly he was aroused by a sharp knock at the door, and his invitation to come in was followed by the appearance of Mr. Weaver. Cordially did the Captain welcome his guest, but it was soon evident that the latter was not in his usual spirits.

“ You ain’t yourself,” said the Captain, dogmatically, at last. “ Got amongst the quicksands, maybe. Now, look here, I’m a man of the world, and like you. Make a clean breast of it, and it’s odds I shall be able to help you.”

“ Troth, there’s nothing the matther, barring I’m puzzled,” replied the Irishman. “ Not that that’s anything surprising, for I’m often taken so. Is Miss Jennie in ? for I’d like to talk to her about it.”

“ No, she’s not, nor likely to be,” replied the Captain, drawing himself up with much dignity. “ But I should have thought the opinion of a man who’s sailed round the world would be better worth having than that of a slip of a girl like her.”

“ Sorra a doubt of it,” replied Mr. Weaver drily, “ an ye happened to have her knowledge of the antecedents of the case.”

“ And what is the case, sir ? ”

“ The case, is it ? Well, it’s hardly to be called a case. It’s only a circumstance.”

“ Go on,” retorted the Captain, loftily.

“ You wouldn’t understand me, maybe, if I did ; and then there would be two of us puzzled instead of one. It would be a pity to addle your brains as well as my own, I’m thinking.”

"My brains are never addled," replied the Captain, considerably nettled.

"Well, I've seen them confused, anyhow, late in the evening," retorted the perfectly unabashed Irishman.

"Gentlemen, sir," returned the Captain, solemnly, "never allude afterwards to the consequences of hospitality;" and the bibulous old mariner threw himself back in his chair with the air of a man who has made his point.

Mr. Weaver for once in his life felt ashamed. He regretted his allusion to the Captain's weakness.

"It's right you are!" he exclaimed, hastily. "Bad luck to my manners! I'd no business to say that to you; but it's bothered I am. You know there's two of the crathers there given leg-bail, don't you?" and Mr. Weaver indicated Portland with a jerk of his thumb.

The Captain nodded assent, for the intelligence that two prisoners had escaped had reached Upway by this. The gun and the black flag made such circumstances known pretty widely; then the local papers, ever on the look-out for a paragraph, were not likely to let such a sensational material slip through their fingers. That there were two fugitives from Portland Prison lying *perdu*, was a fact that had circulated freely through Weymouth and its vicinity.

"Well, you see," said Mr. Weaver, gravely, "I happened to be told off for the picket on Chesil Beach that night—there's mighty little fun in being routed out of your bed for that same, by the way!—and who do you think passed through my sentries? 'Deed, you'd never guess, so it's no use wearing holes in your intellect trying. Dainty Ellerton."

"Mr. Ellerton!" said the Captain meditatively. "Curious! What would he be doing over at Portland at that hour of the morning?"

"Tear an' ages! that's just where it is. I couldn't stop him, you know. If he'd been one of the two chaps I'd been sent down to look after, I couldn't have done it. But what brought him there? You don't happen to think of any reason in particular he might have for being there, do you?" And Mr. Weaver eyed his companion with extraordinary solicitude.

"It's odd, very odd," rejoined the veteran. "Stop," he said, lowering his voice, "his brother's a prisoner, you know. You never heard he was in Portland, did you?"

"I know he is. By all the saints in the Calendar, that's the idea that came into me head! It struck me all of a heap like, that maybe Dainty was just lending a hand to his own brother. I knew him well, poor fellow, before the throuble came upon him. I got another man to take my picket to-night, or it's there I'd have been again. And, on me sowl, I don't know how I could stop Maurice Ellerton, and yet I'd deserve cashiering if I didn't."

"By the Lord! I see it all now," suddenly exclaimed the Captain. "That's the meaning of this young Ellerton yachting long after everybody else has given it up. Depend upon it," he continued, dropping his voice to a mysterious whisper, "that his brother's one of the pair that has just made a bolt of it. Now, Mr. Weaver, I don't like that Dainty, as you call him, but, confound it, he's right to stick to his kin! It's no business of yours or mine, I take it. We don't know, we only guess, and it's not worth while to tell the authorities what we think, eh?"

"I have exchanged duty to keep clear of the whole affair," replied the Irishman, quietly.

"Then just let's you and I have a glass, to wish 'em good speed." And the Captain, having worked back to that particular point of his moral compass to which all his variations of mood inevitably tended, proceeded to put his good wishes into practical shape.

Having done due justice to his toast, the veteran lapsed into reflection. First, the Captain thought that, if he should be right in his conjecture, there would probably be an end to Dainty Ellerton's presence in that part of the world for some time. He thought that the part Dainty would play in his brother's escape was certain to leak out, should it be successful, or otherwise. The Captain held notions somewhat borrowed from his favourite Dibdin concerning constancy in love matters, and looked upon it that Jennie would soon be willing to console herself for

Dainty's absence, and that a lover on the spot had a great advantage over one whose whereabouts and return would be equally uncertain.

Then it flashed across the Captain that Jennie's absence was in some way connected with this escape business. What put it into her head to go over to Portland so suddenly? She had doubtless heard that two prisoners had broken bonds the previous night, although she had said nothing about it. She would hear of it probably from Dainty. Could he mean to carry her off with him too? The blood surged into the old man's temples as this occurred to him, and he put down his pipe.

"Mr. Weaver," he exclaimed, "I shall go over to Portland to-night. There's something I don't like in all this. My girl, I'm afraid, is mixed up in it. I don't want to interfere, but I'll not have Jennie carried off by your friend, except through the church door. It strikes me he means taking her away as well as his felon brother."

"I'll go bail for Dainty's truth on that point," interposed the Irishman hotly. "He means what's right by your niece, whatever his schemes may be."

"I have no faith in popinjays," retorted the Captain curtly, looking for his hat. "I shall go over and stay the night with my brother."

"Listen," said Mr. Weaver, in a low deep whisper. "I'd pledge my life on Dainty's honour; but if ever he wronged your niece, I'd shoot him with my own hand."

The strangely assorted pair then took their way to the railway-station. But besides these, there was also one other who had guessed that the last act of the drama of Maurice Ellerton's crime was about to take place. Miss Fielding, at Bournemouth, had been sorely disappointed at hearing nothing of Dainty. She suspected she knew not what exactly; but that her cousin had now taken into serious consideration what she had urged upon him at Dieppe, she felt assured. One morning she read in the local paper that two prisoners had escaped from Portland the day before. Could Maurice be one of those two? mused Rosie. Meanwhile she kept the paper out of her

aunt's way, and awaited further particulars with feverish impatience.

Portland prison, too, has been considerably excited by the report sent up from the coast-guard station, of Fleming's chase of one of the absentees. They have very little doubt that the coast-guard has made no mistake, and it was one of their lost sheep that he so nearly captured. But the prison did not hear of this till next morning, the third day since Blades and Maurice Ellerton's cells were found empty.





CHAPTER XXXVII.

RECAPTURE OF BLADES.

HE left Mr. Blades in a somewhat grievous predicament, crouching under the cliffs behind Blacknor Point. The fog had saved him, but still the burglar's situation was awkward. He was some distance from his hiding-place, and had rather a hazy conception as to his exact whereabouts. He knew that he could do nothing for the present, so Mr. Blades philosophically curled himself up behind some fallen rocks, and producing a stick of tobacco, cut off a good-sized quid, and commenced calmly, like a cow, to chew and to ruminate.

"Well," he soliloquized, "I've not made a successful 'prospecting' this afternoon. If it hadn't been for this fog, that long-legged beggar would have run me clean into the sea or the lighthouse. I ain't altogether clear where I am now, but there's a couple of miles between me and my supper, I'll bet a sovereign. What a fool I was to come out; still how was I to guess it was so far off sundown. Not a bit of use trying to make tracks back to the chapel till the mist lifts a bit. I might wander about for hours and find myself either back here again, or anywhere else I didn't want to be at the end of it. No! I'll just go to sleep for a spell. It's plaguy raw and cold, and it isn't likely I'll want calling. I'm pretty safe to wake in good time."

Mr. Blades composed himself to sleep; but a raw No-

weather is not favourable to that intention—a night *à la belle étoile* may at times be compassed without inconvenience, but in this case the stars were not to be seen, and the earth lay canopied in dark cold mist. Vainly did the burglar endeavour to persuade himself that he was on the verge of the land of Hypnos—that divinity was determined that he should not cross his frontier. At last, with chattering teeth, he arose, and, to use his own language, “quitted that speculation.” Chilled with the cold, Mr. Blades gazed anxiously around him. The fog was still impenetrable, and he could not see half a dozen yards in front of him. He descended to the path at the edge of the cliff, and commenced to walk backwards and forwards, to warm himself. He could hear the wash of the waves some three hundred feet beneath him—sole sound that broke the silence of the night. He paced up and down for some time, until the blood once more circulated freely through his veins, and then Mr. Blades once more sat down to chew and ruminate. At length he heard footsteps—the burglar crouched to the ground. He was not ten paces from the path. They came nearer and nearer, and Blades saw a huge shadow pass him, and knew that a coast-guard on his rounds had gone by. Still there was no sign of the fog lifting, and hour after hour did the burglar keep weary vigil. He was cold, hungry, and, to say the least, getting not a little disheartened at the turn things had taken. He sat with his elbows on his knees, his head buried in his hands. Suddenly it occurred to him that he saw the outlines of a rock opposite, which he had not noticed before. He drew a long breath, and gazed steadily at the fantastic contour—another five minutes, and he could see this rock plainly. It was not twenty paces from him, but Mr. Blades gave vent to a jubilant whistle, for he knew now that the fog was lifting. Half an hour more, and he had scrambled up to the plateau some fifty feet above him, and was only waiting for a little more light to take stock of his position.

Slowly the fog rolled away, and a faint moon glimmered in the sky. It was still far from daybreak. He had no idea of ~~what~~ time it was, but he recognized that fact. He

could make out to his right the two lighthouses on the Bill, while far away to his front twinkled what Blades rightly guessed were the lights of the prison. He began to understand now where he was. Between him and the chapel lay the villages of Reforne and Easton. The prospect of action had aroused all the burglar's energies again. Instead of skirting those villages, he decided to go through them. "I want clothes," he muttered, "and who knows but what one of them may offer a first-rate chance of procuring them?" Slowly he paces up the long struggling row of houses which constitute the principal street of Reforne. Like most villages of the kind, it had been originally a mere agglomeration of dwellings, which, springing up on each side of a frequented road, had developed from that to a hamlet. Not a soul is astir—not even a dog is there to bark at him. The late rain and the fog have left that dusty, chalky road pleasant walking; and even Blades is not altogether dead to the solemn stillness of the autumnal night. But sentiment never ran in harness with business yet. When a man succumbs to the former, it is odds that he will neglect the latter. Mr. Blades was little likely to fall into such error. Carefully did he examine the inscriptions over the doors of such shops as he came across. Had he been an antiquary, bent on cuneiformical research, he had not studied those advertisements closer. No information wanted the worthy Blades with reference to the early historical inhabitants of the island; but he felt that the necessity of becoming the possessor of a pair of trousers was imperious.

Sorrowfully did he turn his back upon Reforne, regretting, it may be, that the village should bear no testimony to what a man of his talent could do with the aboriginal bolts and bars which characterized the place. But Easton was yet before him, and Easton was close to Portland. It tickled the vanity of this man that he should demonstrate his proficiency in his art as near the walls of his late prison as he could compass. He was as proud of his great ability for burglary as a dramatic author of his craft, as a poet of his song, as a novelist of his romance.

Blades slackened his pace when he came to Easton; here, he felt, it behoved him to achieve fame and panta-

loons. Easton also was locked in repose. Blades coolly perused the signboards until he arrived at one that stated "Men's slops" as among the articles it retailed.

"That will do," he muttered. "What I want I shall find in there."

He examined the house all round. No doubt but that all the inmates were asleep. No light—not a sign of one. He proceeded to investigate the shutters of the shop window; the apparent simplicity of this amazed him. He produced his gimlet, and rapidly bored a quantity of holes; then, taking from his pocket a knife, he cut out the piece of wood he had previously drilled in a couple of minutes. Placing his hand through the aperture, he gently lifted the bar of the shutters and threw them open. Nothing now remained between him and the shop but the window.

"How easy it would be if I'd a diamond!" muttered the burglar. "But as I haven't, here goes!" And placing his elbow against the corner of the pane nearest the bolt, he slowly pressed it till the glass gave way. It fell through without much noise, and the marauder here paused to see if he had awoken any one inside. Apparently not. He waited patiently some ten minutes; still neither light nor sound was to be recognised. Passing his hand through the broken pane, Blades quietly turned back the bolt and threw up the window; another minute and he was in the shop. He was not disappointed; the proprietor was a vendor of ready-made clothes—agricultural, nautical, or fashionable, *i.e.*, as regarded Easton's ideas concerning the latter. Easton on that point was smitten with opinions as to variegated waistcoats and startling neckties. But Blades eschews such vanities, and selects for himself a slop-frock resplendent in buttons, a pair of fustian trousers, a somewhat gaudy neckerchief, it must be admitted, and a good broad-brimmed waggoner's hat. Wrapping his spoils in the aforesaid slop, Mr. Blades steps once more into the street, carefully closing both window and shutters behind him.

He is a great man this—great in his vocation, which is the ransacking of the dwellings of the community without leave or license; but still your great geniuses sometime fail in details. Napoleon the First never took the burn

ing of Moscow into his calculations. Napoleon the Third made similar mistake when he attempted to bestow constitutional freedom on a nation incapable of understanding it. Mr. Blades, in like fashion, has forgotten to provide himself with stockings.

It may be remembered that the Government hose of Portland are blue, with red hoops—a somewhat singular pattern; neat, perhaps, but certainly peculiar. Should those new fustian trousers fail to fit accurately, it is possible that the exposure of that underclothing may prove disastrous to him. It is the smaller wheels of the machine that we always neglect to see to the oiling of, quite forgetting that inefficiency on their part is just as fatal as if the fly-wheel itself were out of gear.

Cautiously does Blades, bearing his prize, steal back towards his hiding-place. Luck seems to run by interims with the majority of mankind. It had been against the burglar all day; it seemed to favour him to-night, and Blades finds his way back to the Roman Catholic chapel without obstruction. Once safe behind the altar again, he indulges in a sacrilegious supper, while he meditates upon what he shall do on the morrow.

"I can't stay here for ever," he mused. "Discovery is certain, sooner or later—I should think sooner, if I gave my candid opinion on the subject. Chesil Beach ain't no use to try as yet. Hang it! I believe there's nothing like cheek. The best dodge I can try is to rig out like a countryman to-morrow, walk down in broad daylight to the station, and ask for a second-class ticket to Weymouth. Yes that's it. I'll go for that, blest if I don't! Meanwhile, I'm dead tired, and can afford to sleep upon it." And with that Mr. Blades stretched himself upon the ground, and was speedily lost to all sense of his immediate situation.

It was late when he awoke next morning. The fatigue and excitement he had undergone, added to the very advanced hour at which he had laid himself down to rest, made him perfectly oblivious of matins. They had fallen all unheeded on his ear. He roused himself, and peeped forth from behind his shelter. The chapel was deserted, he sole tenant of it. The burglar's first act was to attire

himself in the clothes that he had—well, “procured” in Easton overnight. That satisfactorily accomplished, Mr. Blades proceeded not only to fortify his inward man, but to store his pockets with provender, as if with a view to starting on a distant journey. Mr. Blades, after due reflection, had determined to put in execution his ideas of the previous night. There was something that tickled the man’s insatiable vanity exceedingly in the idea of going off in broad daylight, under the very noses of the prison authorities. He had far too much confidence in his own talents to doubt that he could disguise himself, with such means as he now possessed, in a manner to defy detection. One lingering regret he certainly had; he did feel a little sore that opportunity had not been vouchsafed him to make a raid upon the Governor’s house. It was not that he wanted anything, or looked forward to a great booty by so doing; it was the sheer devilment of the affair that had so great an attraction for him. He grinned as he thought how such a feat as that would have been talked of within the prison: but, as he had said himself over-night, he could hardly expect to remain much longer in his present hiding-place undetected. It had been a great inspiration in the first instance, but he had made use of it quite as long as was prudent.

Once more he mounts to the gallery and gazes over the West Quarries. They are deserted; his old comrades are not there, struggling with pick and hammer ‘gainst the stony rock. “Gone to dinner,” muses Mr. Blades. He can see that it is a fine day; the sun comes glinting through the yellow glass of the window, and bathes the chapel in a golden light. “Evidently not working hours, or they would be there,” thinks the burglar. Then he descends, opens the door, and walks boldly and rapidly into the roadway.

It is one of those warm, steamy days that we occasionally meet with in November—days that usually precede some change in the weather, either resolving themselves into rain, or at times into storm and fierce convulsion. Blades, once fairly in the road, saunters along listless and indifferent. Nothing could be better than the *insouciant* manner he assumes. He plods steadily down the hill in

the direction of the railway, even pauses a minute or two to look in at the shop windows, as he passes through the little town of Portland, just above the station. His hat is rather slouched over his eyes, but, unless you noticed that slight peculiarity, there is nothing in his manner to lead one to suppose that he avoided recognition. His assumption of the rustic walk is perfect. If there is one defect in the performance, it is that he is a little over-acting his part. He is so quaint a bumpkin that he is almost liable to attract attention.

He arrives at the station, unchallenged, and sits down in an out-of-the-way corner, to await the starting of the next train. He has no idea when it will go, and does not want to attract attention by making inquiries. He rather shirks the booking-office. He knows that he runs considerable risk of meeting some of the warders, or others connected with the prison, who might recognize him there. He waits patiently until he sees people begin to take their tickets. Then he quietly presents himself at the window, and boldly asks for a "second to Weymouth—*return*." He thinks this likely to divert suspicion from him on the part of the railway officials, and can scarcely suppress a grin as he takes up the ticket.

"I may want it, after all," he mutters. "What a considerate chap I am—always anxious to save Government expense and inconvenience. They'd hardly need taxes, if the world generally was as honourable as I am."

Possessed of his ticket, Mr. Blades once more retired into the background, and remained there until the train backed into the station. He threw a keen glance around; there was nothing to arouse his suspicions, so he walked leisurely down the platform, and ensconced himself in a second-class carriage. Two or three men of the shop-keeper class, a couple of young women, rustic in mien constituted his fellow-passengers. "No harm likely to come of this lot," thought Mr. Blades to himself. The bell rang, the engine shrieked, the wheels slowly revolved, when the door was thrown suddenly open, and a smae, lance-corporal of infantry tumbled head-first into the carriage.

"A close thing, by Jove!" exclaimed the new-comer,

down whose forehead the perspiration streamed. "I thought I'd missed it, though I ran every step from the Verne to the station. They were all so full up there of the doings of one of these chaps who have just broke out of prison. It seems the fellow they're all talking of is a famous burglar, and that he breaks into a house every night now. Committed a burglary in Easton last night, I hear. If I was quartered this side I'd have a look after that chap. They say he is 'lying up' no great distance from the prison, though they can't make out where."

"I heard something about it," observed one of the shopmen.

"I should think you did. Why, our fellows talk of nothing else," retorted the soldier contemptuously. He had all the genuine militaire's disdain for the thoughts and opinions of the civilian world, especially that class of it to which he rightly guessed the speaker belonged. "Well, my lass," he continued, gaily turning to one of the country wenches near him, "do you think you should know this burglar, if you came across him?"

The girl blushed, giggled, declared she couldn't say, and then whispered something into the ear of her companion which set them both tittering. Neither damsel felt at all loth to receive the attentions of the good-looking corporal, and all this little by-play was intended for his encouragement, as if that audacious and youthful non-commissioned officer required anything of that sort—evidence decisive that these Portland Perdidas reckoned few soldiers amongst their acquaintance.

"What part of the rock may you hail from?" inquired the corporal, addressing Blades, who lounged sleepily in his corner of the carriage.

"I cooms from Reforne, I du. You'd know, loikely, the 'Spotted Dawg;' I lives just below he."

The two country girls pricked up their ears, and one of them said audibly, looking curiously at Blades, that she had never heard of that house in Reforne, though she'd lived there all her life.

Mr. Blades, in fact, led on by his vanity, could not resist the temptation of personating the rustic to the very extreme. He had been so often complimented on his histrionic

powers by his comrades in London in bygone days, that he believed very considerably in himself in that respect. He thought that he ran no risk of detection in the present company, and was unable to withstand the allurements of playing the country bumpkin to an audience. He saw that he had committed an imprudence. Of course he had improvised the name of the public-house, but it had not occurred to him that there might be a Reforme person amongst his hearers. But he was quick at averting the consequences of his error.

"Noa," he said slowly, "it ain't likely a lassie like you would knoa of a house like the 'Spotted Dawg.' It bean't what's called a respectable house of call." And having thus spoke, he nestled once more into his corner with the air of a man who declined further controversy on the point.

Overacting again, Mr. Blades! How many men have come to grief and perdition through this besetting sin! Posing yourself for an impersonation of indolence, how could you overlook the shortness of those recently-acquired fustian trousers? That keen-eyed corporal has caught a glimpse—a mere glimpse—of your stocking before you remember to draw the leg of those traitorous unmentionables once more neatly over your boot. Ah! Mr. Blades, that inquisitive non-commissioned officer labours under the impression that your hose is of blue, hooped with scarlet, and has already dedicated himself to the ascertaining of that fact. You little think, as you affect to sleep in your corner, what ideas are floating under your *vis-à-vis's* forage-cap.

"So you never heard of the 'Spotted Dog' in Reforme?" said the soldier.

"No, never," replied the girl; "and it's queer I shouldn't, as have lived there all my life."

"Ah!" laughed the corporal, "there's many a thing a young woman like you never heard of. I don't suppose you've heard of a husband yet, though they must be blind at Reforme, if you don't before the year's out. Can't you find a sweetheart?"

The girl tossed her head indignantly.

"That's the way with you all," said the soldier—"to

your mind,' I'd have said, if you'd given me time to finish what I was saying. But a woman never has patience to wait. If you don't tell 'em you love 'em quick, they look round for some one who will. Dash it! there goes my pipe." And the corporal stooped in pursuit of that cherished article, which he seemed to have some idea must have fallen into Mr. Blades's boots.

But this groping about his feet aroused the burglar's suspicions. He withdrew them under the seat, and surlily acknowledged the corporal's apologies.

The train slackened its pace as it neared Rodwell, and Mr. Blades, momentarily forgetting his *sang-froid*, gave evidence of preparing for departure. He gathered his smock-frock around him, and leant out of the window to reconnoitre. Off came that non-commissioned officer's forage-cap, and rolled upon the floor of the carriage; he seemed predestined to drop his personalities, and the recovery of the cap led him once more into the vicinity of Blades' boots. "I'm bound to see the pattern of those stockings," muttered the stooping soldier, recovering himself, after receiving a nasty blow in the face from the apparently unconscious burglar's foot.

It perhaps made little difference in reality, but it had the effect of rousing the soldier's blood. He determined to test his suspicions at any cost. He would probably have done the same, though in less peremptory fashion, had Blades refrained from such dexterous use of his foot. As it was, when the burglar turned away from the window, he was suddenly hurled back upon the seat, and before he had time to recover from the sudden assault, his trousers were drawn half-way up his leg, and the fatal stocking exposed to view.

"Convict hose, by Heaven!" exclaimed the corporal. "Here, guard, porters, some of you! Here's a return fare whom they'll be glad to see back again the other side. Ah! would you," he said, fiercely, as Blades, with gleaming eyes, thrust his hand into his pocket. "Don't be a fool, governor, the game's up; and I'll knock your two eyes into one if you show a knife."

It was hard—so near to freedom, and yet recaptured. Another moment, and Blades philosophically reflected that

all was over—that a savage assault on the soldier would in no wise extricate him from the toils, but be simple aggravation of his offence. Already the railway people and passengers crowded round the carriage door; and though in his then frame of mind the burglar thought that a lance-corporal more or less in the world would be no great matter, and was quite prepared to do away at all events with one, yet he had sense enough left to see that he would be a prisoner once more under any circumstances. Better those circumstances should be as easy as possible. So Mr. Blades abandoned his first murderous idea of burying his knife in the corporal's diaphragm, and submitted quietly to his destiny.

He was quite a lion at the Rodwell station, as he sat, for about an hour or so, guarded by a couple of policemen and his captor, awaiting the next train back to Portland. He had made no secret of his name; and many were the people who came and eyed curiously the famous burglar—he of the famous city robberies, and whom Portland's bars had failed to retain within her bosom. The levee rather flattered him, still he could not but feel a pang when, on the train coming up, his captor bade him “good-bye,” and remarked, “If you hadn't been so uncommon handy with that ‘Spotted Dog,’ I'm not so sure I'd have suspected you.”





CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE ESCAPE FROM THE BILL.

THAT warm steamy November day was succeeded by a glorious night. The moon, almost at the full, shimmered bright over the bay of Weymouth and the harbour of refuge—glittered on the rough jagged stone of the outer breakwater, and shed a soft radiance over the grey rock of Portland. A breeze had sprung up towards sundown—a light south-westerly wind that seemed rather on the increase. Fitter night for his enterprise Dainty could scarcely have hoped for. He has been upon the island in the morning and held conference with Nance. She has assured him of his brother's safety, and undertaken that Maurice shall be at the trysting place on the west side of the Bill at ten or thereabouts. No news of Mr. Blades' capture has reached the yacht, when unfurling her sails she glides slowly out of the harbour and stretches away in the direction of the Burning Cliff. Off that she goes about and proceeds to beat her way steadily towards the light-ship that lies anchored east of the Shambles. Though there is not much of it as yet, still it is a head-wind, and the Maid of the Mist is some time before she leaves that treacherous shoal to leeward. That past, she bears up for the West Bay, but has to make many a stretch still before she breasts the Race all dancing and frothing in the moonlight. As she clear it, she runs close inland, and catches the full swing of the six-knot tide, which, conjoined with

the wind now almost on her quarter, speeds her up the West Bay gallantly. Half way up she goes about, and Dainty gives the order to heave-to just off Blacknor Point, and lower the gig. The men are accustomed to his vagaries by this—they regard him as the most whimsical yachtsman they ever served under, but they rather like him, and hold him in much respect. His contempt for weather, if it conduces in some measure to their own discomfort, excites their admiration. He has gradually impregnated them too with his own unbounded confidence in the sailing powers of the Maid of the Mist. Dainty firmly believes that you might take her round the Horn with perfect impunity. She is, in fact, a rare good sea-boat, and, as the master says, “makes nothing of weather.” Still, eccentric as they know “the gov’nor” to be, both master and men are puzzled by this order. What’s he up to? What can he be going to do now? What is his little game? are interrogatories bandied pretty freely among the crew. Still they know Dainty far too well to hesitate for an instant about obeying. Discipline on board the Maid is no mockery, and Dainty has shown more than once that he can deal sharply with any hesitation about the execution of his orders.

He had been on deck ever since they started, smoking incessantly. More silent, thinks the master, even than is his usual custom; and Mr. Redman holds that a more taciturn employer he never sailed under. Now he throws the end of his cigar into the sea, and descends to his cabin. When he reappears, he carries with him a sack, which he directs to be placed in the gig. The boat already lies alongside.

“Show a light at the yard-arm; keep a sharp look-out for our return, and have the men all ready at the tackles to hoist the boat aboard quickly,” said Dainty.

“Ay, ay, sir,” responds the master; “but, with all due deference, I think it would be as well not to be longer than you can help. The breeze looks like freshening, and this is an awkward place to be caught in, if it come on to blow strong from the sou’-west.”

“I shan’t be longer than I can help, you may depend upon it,” rejoined Dainty curtly, as he slipped over the

side. Then seating himself in the boat, he took the yoke-lines himself, and briefly ordered the men to "give way."

They did, and with a will; the gig fairly danced over the water. Dainty steered at first pretty nearly straight for the island, so as to get clear of the tide, which ran strong enough to almost neutralize the exertions of his men, had he attempted to keep a direct course for the Bill; but once under the shelter of the cliffs, he was clear of that obstacle, and proceeded to coast along them. On they went, disturbing clouds of sea-birds on their way, which soared above them, uttering discordant protestations at such invasion of their slumbers. Upon still nights the shores of the West Bay are covered with countless flocks of gulls, divers, cormorants, etc., which, disdain the more certain roosting-place of the steeps above, sleep placidly on the treacherous waters.

Still on they go, heedless of screech of cormorant or dolorous cry of gull. The cliffs begin to lower; the beads of perspiration stand on the foreheads of the oarsmen. Dainty sits silent, impassive; no sign of flurry or impatience on him now. Action has come at last, perchance danger; but Dainty is cool enough, though still revolving that last ugly warning of the skipper's in his mind, "The breeze looks like freshening." He knows perfectly well what that means. If it should come on to blow hard before the next three hours or so are past, there will be danger—ay, considerable danger—to him and all concerned in the expedition.

He looks at his watch anxiously as they near the Bill; it marks but fifteen minutes of ten. He had meant to be there rather earlier, but it had taken him longer to beat up to the West Bay than he had calculated on in the first place; it had taken him longer to pull from the yacht to the Bill, in the second. And yet his men had been no finchers. But Dainty had hardly allowed for the current that runs round Portland Bill at flood-tide.

As they pass a gloomy, cavernous cleft, up which the water runs with an ominous, sucking sound, suggestive of many a murderous secret that those babbling waves could unfold did they list, Dainty gives the word to "easy."

Slowly now they steal along until they arrive at a place where the cliff, yet some sixty feet above their heads, descends towards the sea in a succession of ledges, severally some ten or twelve feet in height. The formation is curious, and to see the angry waters break over the very topmost of these, as they career before a fierce gale from the south-west, is a sight worth trudging many a weary mile to see. Those who have seen Portland Bill storm-lashed, in clear weather, have seen that which will make most scenery look tame afterwards. Below these ledges juts into the sea what appears like a confused heap of gigantic folios, thrown down as you might see them in an antiquary's library, as if Portland kept here the granite records of her weird history.

There the rocks stand, grey and worn by the wash of the waters, looking, as I said before, like two huge heaps of folio volumes, from the lesser and inner of which the topmost has fallen away, and rests on the outer, while the restless ocean frets incessantly between them.

When he arrived at this quaint landmark, Dainty ordered his men to unship their oars, called to the man in the bow to stand ready to fend her off the rocks, and began rapidly to open his mysterious sack. The sailors looking on mute and wondering. From the depths of that canvas bag Dainty drew first a white stone, to which was attached some thirty or forty feet of line. He coiled this carefully on one side, and then produced a rope-ladder some twenty feet in length, and fitted at the top with a couple of iron hooks or grapnels. "What next?" thought the sailors; but Dainty, this accomplished, threw himself back in the stern sheets, and seemed immersed in reverie. The men marvelled much what their errand could be at the base of those rocks at this time of night. Still more were they puzzled at the mysterious tackle their employer had produced from his canvas bag. But leaving Dainty to his reflections, and his crew to their bewilderment, we must now take a glance back at the barn in Southwell.

Maurice Ellerton had climbed to his window that morning, and recognized the glory of the day. His spirits rose as he contemplated it. He felt assured that at nightfall he should make his final throw for freedom—anything was

better than this skulking, this suspense. Preferable, far, the attempt were made, and he relegated once more to the prison, should it fail, than continue to pass the weary hours alone with the rats and his conscience. His nervous system was giving way under the enforced solitude. He felt that he would rather give himself up than go through a week of it. But to-day it was different. His heart beat high. Surely he must be summoned to try his fortune to-night, and Maurice felt elate and confident as the sweet sunshine stole in upon his gloomy lurking-place. Once more he climbed to the window, and watched the sun go down in a flood of crimson light; one of those glorious sunsets we occasionally see late in the autumn, and which so often presage stormy weather. But Maurice thought not of that. To him that sunset promised freedom, release from shame, the commencement of a new career. The broken, fallen man was to bury his past, and, under another name, and in another land, work out both his redemption and atonement. Very full of high resolve was Maurice that bright afternoon. As the sun dipped below the horizon, his meditations took more sombre form, but he inwardly vowed that, should he be rescued from the felon's doom that had been decreed him, he would honestly strive to repair the past. Reflection made in bitter anguish by most of us at times. What resolutions we all make on the subject of tight boots when the shoe pincheth, yet our vanity shortly leads us to be *bien chaussés* once more.

He sits on his straw impatiently awaiting the summons to act. He frets and fidgets with nervous eagerness to commence this *coup* for liberty. Suddenly the soft mellow moonlight trickles, if one may be allowed the phrase, through the still open shutter. Once more he climbs to the window, gazes in wrapt admiration at the bright, clear goddess of night, watches the soft, fleecy clouds as they glide gently through the sky, and listens to the low, distant sigh of the wind. It is a marvellous autumn evening. Fitter night for nocturnal enterprise it would be hard to pitch upon. Such a night as an enthusiastic poacher would be ashamed to lose. Such a night as would cause his natural foe, the keeper, to rouse up all his myrmidons for the keeping of watch and ward.

He sits coiled up on the heap of *débris* that he has raised, watching the splendour of the heavens, all jewel-besprinkled with stars, and for a few minutes almost forgets his situation. Suddenly, although he has seen no one, he hears the click of the latch, and through the faint light can distinguish a female form. In an instant he has dropped on the floor by her side, and discovers that it is his visitor of last night. He is a little disappointed: he would have liked to have seen that other girl once more—she who is to be Dainty's wife. A second thought, and he knows it is better that it is not so. Surely Dainty is risking enough for him as things are at present, without chancing that the woman he loves should stand the hazard of imprisonment for abetting him in his most illegal proceedings. Jennie, although she could not withstand having just a little to say to the escape, knew well how wroth her lover would be should she run any danger in the affair. Moreover, it would not have been easy for her to leave her father's house for long without attracting attention. Jennie was but an occasional visitor, and her people were wont to make a great deal of her when they did get hold of her.

"I've come for you in earnest," said Nance curtly. "If you're ever to go, it will be to-night. There, you'd better have something to eat and drink first; we've half an hour to spare. Say when you're ready:" and having handed him the basket she carried, Nance sat down quietly on a broken barrow, and buried her face in her hands.

"What's the matter?" asked Maurice, gently. He was a little afraid of this half-crazed girl, to tell the truth, and wished heartily that his guidance had fallen into other hands.

"What's the matter? You! If I could make sure I should never see another Ellerton again, it's blythe I'd be about to-night's work; but I shall—I know I shall. You're bound to bring trouble to her I love, best;" and leaning her chin upon her hands, Nance stared fixedly at her questioner.

Very dim was the light in the old barn, and Maurice could see his companion's face but indistinctly. Still her words made him extremely uneasy. It was evident the

girl bore no good-will to either his brother or himself. Could he depend upon her? Would she prove true to him? He had no alternative but to trust to her, and yet he by no means liked the idea of being so completely in her power. However, it was done now; whether she played him fair or false, lay entirely at her own discretion.

"You needn't be afraid," suddenly interrupted Nance, in a harsh voice. "I know what you're thinking. No matter what might happen to you if I had my way, because I haven't. I've promised Miss Jennie to see you safe to the Bill. If I don't, it will be because I can't help it. But never fear; we shall get there all right. Now, if you're ready, the sooner we're off the better."

Maurice rose at once to his feet. Another minute, and they stood outside the barn, in the full flood of the moonlight. Suddenly Nance paused.

"Listen," she said. "I've a notion just come into my head. We'll just walk easy through the village; there'll be few people about this end of it, and it'll be easier and quicker than going round by the fields at the back. Walk slow, mind, as if you was courting me," she continued, with a grin; "and if anybody notices us much, I'd recommend you, for your own sake, to put your arm round me."

"I understand," replied Maurice, and the two strolled through the straggling street like a pair of rustic lovers.

The few people they encountered took very little heed of them. A sly, inquisitive glance was occasionally thrown their way, but that was all. There was no need for the more amorous demonstration which Nance had so drily suggested. A few minutes more, and, clearing the village, they struck across the open down, upon which stand the two lighthouses; their brilliancy somewhat paled to-night in presence of the Regent of the heavens, who held royal state in absence of her lord.

"You see the lighthouses," said Nance, tersely. "We run no risk till we get near them. I mean to pass between 'em—they're half a mile apart. When we get there we shall have to look out for coastguards. Coastguards is beasts," she continued, meditatively, with a retrospective glance at the calling of most of her acquaintance on the island.

If the moonlight made them easy to discern, it also enabled them to descry any one who might lie in their path. Once or twice Nance suggested that they should crouch on the turf, as some distant shadow that she did not quite approve of caught her eye; but on the whole they held the tenor of their way without interruption. They have passed the lighthouses now, and are rapidly approaching the shore.

"You are safe now," said Nance, in low tones; "unless we come across a coastguard on the rocks. If we do, mind, we're going to Chesiltown by the cliff. Your friends have arrived."

"How can you know?" inquired Maurice, whose heart beat fast at the thought of being so near to freedom.

"Can't you hear the skirling of the seamews?" replied the girl, contemptuously. "What else do you suppose roused them from their pillows but your friend's boat? It were as well you were aboard it, though, and no time lost. The wind is freshening every minute, and the West Bay is no safe place in a sou'-wester. But here we are," she continued, as they gained the edge of the cliff, and peered anxiously over the water; "and there's the boat. We are in luck, there's not a soul about. Come along, you must make up your mind to scramble a bit." And Nance, who could climb like a wild cat, descended rapidly to the second ledge. Maurice followed her from ledge to ledge, till they stood upon the lowest, some twenty feet yet above the water.

They had been viewed from the boat long before this, and no sooner had they gained the lower platform than Dainty, in a low voice, called out "Catch!" and threw the white stone, with the line attached to it, on to the rocks at their feet. They picked up the line, and by its means speedily drew up the rope-ladder which was fastened to the other end of it. It was easy work to fix the grapnels in the rock, and then Maurice felt that his liberty was realized. He turned to bid adieu to his guide before he descended; but Nance drew back.

"You owe me nothing," she said. "Had I my own will, I would have handed you over to the jailers again, if I interferred about you at all. I have only obeyed one

whom I'm bound to obey. I hate you and all your name!"

This was no time for argument, Maurice knew, especially with such an uncompromising antagonist.

"I'm very sorry," he said briefly. "I should have liked to have parted friends with you, after all you've done for me. As it is, I can only thank you, and say 'good-bye.'"

Maurice slipped quickly down the ladder. But the swell was now so great that the gig was unable to approach close to the cliff. They stretched an oar towards him, and Maurice, throwing himself into the sea, sprang at it. He caught it, and was hauled into the boat, somewhat wet, but otherwise none the worse for his plunge.

A clasp of the hand was all that passed between the brothers as Maurice seated himself in the stern-sheets behind Dainty. "Give way, my lads!" cried the latter; "and with a will. We've the tide under us this time, remember."

Better for them they had not, as the sequel will show. Even Dainty stared a little aghast, as, steering very differently from his previous course, he directed the gig's head well out into the bay, so as to catch the full benefit of the current before he laid her nose straight for the yacht. Three things struck him forcibly—the increase of the wind, the strength of the tide, and the magnitude of the heavy swell that was now rolling in.

"Well," said Nance, as, having cast the rope-ladder into the sea, she stood looking after the fast-receding boat, "if I know anything of Portland weather, they'll need all their manhood before morning."





CHAPTER XXXIX.

CHESIL BEACH.



A GOOD two hours have elapsed since Dainty and the gig left the Maid of the Mist, and those on board the yacht grew desperately uneasy. The sailors can see that the wind is freshening every minute, can mark how the great rollers increase in magnitude as, tossing aloft their white crests, they come tumbling in before the gale. They know, too, that less than two miles to leeward rise the precipitous iron cliffs of Portland, and can understand that their situation is becoming dangerous. But the master knew more than this. He is thoroughly aware of the tremendous tide running round the Bill just now, and almost meeting the wind—crossing it, at all events, diagonally. He hardly likes to acknowledge, even to himself, what he really thinks, but it does cross his mind that the Maid will never round Portland Bill again. He is very uneasy—it is impossible to keep the yacht hove to and hold her place—she is drifting before wind and tide palpably towards Blacknor Point. Head-sails are set, and she makes short tacks to and fro, with the object of keeping her station as near as may be. Men are sent aloft, and anxious eyes scan the waters in every direction for the returning boat. At last the welcome cry comes from the main-top that the gig is sighted. “No time to be lost,” thinks Redman, and putting the helm hard up, they bore up to meet the absentees. Dainty and his crew have had a severe time of

it. Although the tide favoured them, yet the heavy sea impeded their progress, and it required careful and dexterous steering to prevent the boat being swamped. Small attention is paid by the sailors to the stranger, as he scrambles on board with Dainty and his followers. All are too impressed now with the gravity of their position to have time to notice Maurice. The main thing is to hoist the gig on board as quickly as may be, and leave the dangerous vicinity they are now in.

"It will be touch and go, Mr. Ellerton," says the skipper, calmly. "We ought to have been out of this more than an hour ago. The Race must be boiling like a cauldron just now, and it will take us all we can screw out of the schooner, good sea-boat as she is, to weather Portland Bill to-night; and remember, there will be no chance of running inside the Race with this wind."

"I know it," said Dainty. "I have marked this con-founded gale coming on as carefully as you, and see that we are likely to have a squeak for it. However, there's the gig on board at last. Now put her head sou'-east of the Race, and let's see if she can make it!"

"Ay, ay, sir," replied Redman, and he walked away to give the necessary orders. In another minute or two he returned. "We shall know our fate pretty soon now," he observed. "If we don't get round this stretch, we never shall. That means going on shore, sir, of course, you understand!"

"Certainly not," retorted Dainty. "If we don't fetch it this time we may next."

"Don't deceive yourself, Mr. Ellerton," replied the skipper, quietly. "If we don't round Portland Bill this time, the Maid of the Mist will never leave the West Bay again."

"Nonsense; we can get out to the westward, if it comes to the worst."

"With this wind, sir," replied the skipper, with a smile, "never! We must round Portland Bill, or go ashore."

Dainty was too good a sailor not to understand the force of Redman's argument. Loth though he might be to recognize it, he did now thoroughly comprehend the

scrape they were in—though that, perhaps, is hardly the proper term to describe the situation of men who were literally carrying their lives in their hands—that moment.

Maurice had said scarce a word to his brother since he had entered the boat ; he had seen there that the steering required all Dainty's attention. Once on board the Maid, and he had grasped the situation in an instant. He had had a good deal of yachting in his time, and he saw that they were in immense danger. Reflection came quick upon him. It was not that he was afraid of death—over and over again had he thought that it would be better for all he held dearest that he should die—but Maurice was sore troubled at the idea that his brother and all these men would probably pay the like penalty for having attempted his rescue. Suddenly Dainty draws near to him.

"I've done my best for you, Maurice," he says, gravely, "but I fear you might have been better off if I had never urged you to attempt an escape."

"Don't think that," replied the other. "Sooner any fate than life at Portland. It is only that I have involved you and all these poor fellows in danger that unmans me. But this is no time for talk, Dainty. I know enough of the sea to understand that our situation is hazardous in the extreme. It will be touch-and-go weathering that point."

The yacht slipped through the heavy rollers bravely. The master himself was at the helm, and kept her as close to the wind as she could bear ; more than once, indeed, the jib shivered as the schooner was brought more directly into the wind's eye than she could answer to. The men clustered forward. More than one wave broke in torrents of silver foam over the counter, deluging the deck with glittering water. By the clear moonlight they could see the surging breakers round the Bill plainly now. Two or three minutes of intense suspense, and it is evident that the Maid will never clear it. A cry from the sailors forward informs the master of the fact.

"Take the wheel, sir," he exclaims to Dainty, sharply, "and keep her up all you can, while I take a look at how

things stand with us." The brothers dashed to the helm, and Redman sprang into the main rigging. A glance convinced him that it was hopeless. The yacht could never clear the Bill, much less run outside the Race beyond it. "All hands 'bout ship," he cried, in stentorian tones; and the crew, alive to the emergency of the situation, responded promptly to his call. Another couple of minutes, the yards are braced round, and, turning her stern to the fatal point, the yacht runs off on the other tack.

Along stretch, this time to the westward, during which all on board preserve an anxious silence, or converse in short, jerky sentences, as men do when facing imminent peril. The master and Dainty are at the helm, while Maurice stands close by, ready to render assistance if necessary. Every one knows that this is merely preliminary to the great struggle; that when they next go about the fierce contest for life will begin; that, if they fail to get out of the West Bay next time, there is nothing for them but to go ashore. It is blowing a heavy gale now, and the sea running high before it; it is palpably evident to all on board that they are gradually nearing the land.

Meanwhile the situation of the yacht has attracted the attention of the coastguard on Portland. These men, when they first discovered her, saw that she was hove to, and marvelled greatly. What could her people be about, they asked, to stay loitering there, with a sou'-west gale unmistakably springing up. Then they saw that, unable to keep her place, she had hoisted sail, and was making short tacks to and fro. What could she be lingering there for? Did not those in charge of her know that every minute was of consequence, if she ever meant to go out of the West Bay again?—that another half-hour would make it difficult, a whole one most likely consign them to destruction? Still the schooner manœuvred backwards and forwards, as if not knowing what to do with herself. At last she suddenly brought up, and then the excited knot of spectators—for quite a little crowd had collected by this time—made out that she had picked a boat up. Marvel on marvel—what could her boat have been about?—what

was she doing? The coastguard were all alive now, and suspicious of that schooner's character. Then they saw her bear up to the sou'-east, and fail to weather the Bill.

"It don't matter a deal what she is," exclaimed Jim Fleming, dogmatically, as he closed his night-glass. "She'll lay her bones on Chesil Beach before morning."

There are three old acquaintance of ours in that little group, one of whom feels her heart stand still at the coast-guard'sman's oracular verdict. Jennie Holdershed is there, with her uncle and Nance. The Captain, on arriving at Portland, had proceeded to his brother's house near Southwell, where he was most heartily welcomed. He took an early opportunity of informing his niece privately of what Mr. Weaver had told him; that he himself suspected Maurice Ellerton to be one of the two escaped prisoners, and that Dainty Ellerton and herself were both actively engaged in assisting the fugitive to evade the pursuit of the authorities.

"Now, my girl," continued the Captain, gravely, "I can't blame that dandy chap for trying to help his brother—he's bound to do it; but I don't want you mixed up in the matter. And then, if he means to take him off in this yacht, as I suppose he does, I'll not stand his taking you too. I don't like this sweetheart of yours; but if he comes and takes you to church, as a decent man ought to do the woman he loves, well, I've nothing to say against it; but, if you don't give me your word that you won't go away with him now, I'm (forcible adjuration here) "if I don't tell my story to the authorities."

"And if you did I'd never set foot in your house again," retorted the girl, with a quick, imperious nod of her head. "But I know you better, uncle; you won't do that. Listen to me. I've told you I'm pledged to Dainty, and I'll keep that promise, whatever happens, and I'll go to him whenever he calls me, let any of you say what you may. But he is quite as anxious as you can be that I should have nothing to do with this business. I've had a little, though, all the same," she continued, with a smile.

"I shouldn't have been happy unless I had had just a tiny bit to say to it. But, uncle, I'm not going away with him now; he wouldn't take me if I wished it, and I have said good-bye to him for some time to come. But I couldn't rest in Upway while it was going on; I was compelled to come over here, to know that they get away safely. You mustn't be angry with me. Whatever Maurice has done, poor fellow! remember he will be my brother some day."

She says this softly, and drops her head upon her hand. It was on that sunny afternoon which preceded the gale that this conversation took place.

"Well, my lass," replied the Captain at length, completely vanquished by Jennie's speech, "you can't suppose I want to give up this poor fellow to the prison folks. They let him go, and it's their business to catch him. I was only uneasy about you. Now you tell me you're not mixed up in the business, I'm satisfied, and you're not, you know, eh?" and the veteran looked anxiously at his niece.

"Uncle," she replied proudly, and drawing herself up to her full height, "did I ever lie to you?"

"No," replied the Captain, confusedly, and with a hazy idea that he did not confine himself quite so strictly to facts as puritanical people might think desirable. "I suppose," he continued, meditatively, "they'll take advantage of a night such as this is like to be——"

"Yes," said Jennie, "they will go to-night. I must just step out to see them off. No," she went on, in reply to what she saw legible in her uncle's face, "I'm not going near them. You can come with me, if you will."

And so it was that Jennie and the Captain had found their way to the West Cliff, and watched the movements of the yacht from Blacknor Point in the first instance. Here they were found by Nance, who told them that the escape was so far effected, and that Maurice had been picked up by his brother just above the Bill. The freshening of the wind, and the rising of the sea, struck awe to the hearts of all three. If Nance and the Captain

were not as deeply interested in the result as Jennie, yet they were quite as much alive to the danger that awaited the schooner. But the trio viewed it very differently. The Captain, with all the anxiety that a sailor must ever feel at the sight of a ship that he foresees must shortly be in desperate straits; Nance with a fierce exultation that her vision, at all events, could not be accomplished this time. Was not Miss Jennie safe on land, let what would happen to Dainty Ellerton? "Good thing if he were drowned quietly out of the way," thought Nance. As for Jennie, her heart stood still, and her pulses well-nigh ceased to beat, as she saw what a terrible struggle with the elements her lover was committed to.

"She's gone about, and taken a westerly course now," exclaimed another of the little knot, who was keenly watching the yacht through his glass. "What does that mean?"

"Mean!" replied Fleming, gravely—"it means that she's doomed. She'll make a long stretch that way, and find she is drifting nearer and nearer the shore, in spite of all she can do; then she'll go about again, and try to weather the Bill; she won't, and those who want to see the end of her, or render help to those on board of her, had best come down to Chesil Beach with me. We can get the rocket apparatus ready, and lines and things, and maybe pull ashore some of them."

"He speaks truth, uncle, does he not?" asked Jennie, with quivering lips. "Even my knowledge of Portland weather tells me that much."

"I'm afraid so, dear," replied the Captain gently. He had put his own wonderful telescope to his eye, but failed to see more than simple facts through it on this occasion. All his sailor interest was aroused in the fate of that yacht so assuredly destined, as he conceived, to destruction. He had not forgot, too, how terrible this must be for Jennie—to see in all probability her lover perish before her eyes. With all his love for strong waters and strong language, that roaring bibulous old mariner had a marvellously tender heart. He was quite subdued to-night in presence of the sorrow that threatened his niece. Even

he himself, although Dainty Ellerton had never been a favourite of his, could not but feel sad at the idea of one he had known so recently being in such imminent peril as Dainty was at that minute.

Meanwhile the little crowd hurried down to Chesil Beach, upon which Fleming, and all those most qualified to judge, held that the final act of the tragedy would take place. The news had spread, and the shingle was soon covered with spectators. Eager to assist many of these, and lines, rockets, blue lights, etc., were got in readiness for use, when the catastrophe deemed so inevitable should occur. Jennie and the Captain took quite a feverish interest in all the preparations. The girl fidgeted quickly backwards and forwards through the throng, looking at this, and insisting upon having explained to her the utility of that, and ever and anon casting an anxious glance seaward—that direction in which all eyes were strained. The schooner was no longer visible. Some of those with glasses still contended that they could catch her sails in the moonlight, and the Captain, utterly unable to stand such eclipse of his favourite "companion," averred that he saw her distinctly. But to the majority of the crowd the Maid of the Mist was imperceptible.

At last Jennie stood motionless, leaning on her uncle's arm, her eyes gazing fixedly to the westward across the tumbling waters. She could not repress a slight shiver as she viewed the great waves come thundering in on the beach, and thought how soon Dainty might be wrestling for life among them.

On board the schooner there was no one ignorant of the desperate game they were playing with death; but, as is ever the case with well-disciplined bodies of men, they faced their doom quietly and coolly. The seamen knew that they were in great danger, but they had implicit confidence in Dainty and Redman. If they were to be saved, they knew that it could only be by prompt obedience to orders. They clustered round their several stations, very quiet, very grave, but very resolute. No need to call upon them; every man was in his place, prepared to fight out the battle to the last. Once more came the

command to " 'bout ship." Quick as thought the yards were braced, and the Maid's head laid once more to the south-east.

Shrill whistles the wind now, and the sea comes tumbling in heavily before it, while the moon shines brightly down upon all the turmoil. They can hear the thunder of the waters on Chesil Beach, as the Maid, trying hard to keep her head to the southward of Portland lights, ploughs wearily through the waves, reeling and staggering like a drunken man, when the big rollers break fiercely over her weather-bow. Anxiously do those on board mark her progress—keen is the watch kept on those brilliant lights, which they all know they must round if they are to escape shipwreck. For a little it seems as if there was a chance, but no sooner do they meet the full force of the fierce six-knot tide now running round the Bill, than it is apparent that they drift hopelessly to leeward. Clear the Race, indeed!—it is doubtful whether they could even make Blacknor Point, supposing that was likely to be any good to them, which it is not. More precipitous place to be dashed against they could hardly select.

"It is all over," said Dainty; "we can't do it. Nothing for it but to run her ashore."

The skipper nodded assent. He had a wife and children that he dearly loved, and knew now that his chances of seeing them again waxed small. Still it was in steady tones that he replied :

"Stand on a few minutes more, sir, while we throw up rockets and burn blue lights. They've most likely seen us from the beach, and will signal us where to make for."

Yes, Chesil Beach was watching them closely. Already the spectators there saw that the attempt was hopeless—that the schooner, as Jim Fleming had predicted some time back, would lay her bones on the shingle. The Captain felt his niece's grasp tighten on his arm. He turned to look at her, and whisper words of comfort, if he might, in her ear. Alas! what was he to say? She knew the danger as well as he did—it would be mockery to mutter platitudes to this girl who stood with blanched cheeks and bloodless lips beside him. He only pressed her arm closely in return.

Whiz now goes rocket after rocket from the Maid, acknowledging her despair, and wildly inquiring where best she may make an end of it; quick and fast come the rockets from the beach, in response, inviting her to her death-struggle. Blue lights flame freely on the shore. Jim Fleming and others stand by the life-lines, and watch with feverish impatience what the schooner will do next.

"All hands 'bout ship!" thunders Dainty, on board the yacht; and no sooner is the manœuvre accomplished, than his voice rings clear again above the tumult of wind and waters. "For'ard all," he cries, "and prepare to swim for your lives. I'm going to drive her stem on for the beach. I can only promise her head shall be kept straight. Go forward, if you please, with the rest, Mr. Redman."

"My place is on the quarter-deck," returned the skipper, coolly, "and I'm not going to leave it."

"Obey orders, sir!" replied Dainty, sharply. "My brother and I are answerable for the course now. Stand to the wheel, Maurice. Good-bye, Redman."

The skipper paused, irresolute for a moment, then gripped Dainty's hand and disappeared forward.

The two brothers were alone at the helm.

"It's all over," said Maurice, at length. "There's not time to say much. Another few minutes, and our lives won't be worth ten seconds' purchase. I've no sorrow for myself, Dainty, but I am bitterly grieved for you."

"Don't trouble about that," replied the other. "I take a good deal of drowning. But if you do scrape through, and I don't, mind you are to let Jennie Holdershed know that I murmured her name as I drove the Maid of the Mist through the surf. She will be my wife if I live; if I don't, I think she would like to know that her name was on my lips to the last."

A sentimental idea!—perhaps so. Men do divulge most unexpected veins of sentiment on such occasions. But there was no time for further conversation. Aided by wind and tide, the schooner sped to her grave with the swiftness of a sea-gull. The crowd on Chesil Beach could see

her distinctly now, could mark the sailors clustering about the fore-rigging. Voices were hushed—men and women held their breath in presence of the coming catastrophe. There was destruction in the fierce blowing gale—death in the foaming surf. A few minutes more, and the angry waves would toss contemptuously at their feet some battered effigies of man—would, perchance, whirl high on the cruel shingle corse after corse. They were prepared to do all that men might do to save those doomed ones from destruction, but the veriest neophyte there could but know how fearful were the chances against any one winning his way successfully through that boiling sea that raged so savagely before them.

Twice did Jennie, with convulsive sob, drop her face on her uncle's shoulder to shut out the sickening sight from her gaze, but it was no use. Her passionate love for Dainty compelled her to witness the tragedy. On comes the yacht, scarce two hundred yards from the shore now. As the Maid plunges within the surf Jennie closes her eyes for a second. A crash, a wild exclamation from the crowd, shrieks,—death-notes in some of these last,—and the noise of falling timber. Then comes the sharp whiz of a rocket, and a confusion of tongues. Jennie opens her eyes. The yacht lies apparently not thirty yards from the beach. The foremast had come down, snapped like a carrot, as she struck. Now she swings round, and lies broadside to the shore, while the waves break furiously over her. The coastguard have succeeded in throwing their line over almost the centre of the schooner, and there, under the directions of the skipper, the crew are drawing in a rope along which a cradle may work. Near as they are to the land, no man could hope to make his way through that boiling surf. Swimmer or no swimmer, his chances would have been much the same. Another terrible wave, and, throwing his arms up in despair, a sailor is seen tossed like a cork upon its crest. Slipping a life-line round his body, Jim Fleming dashes boldly through the surf to the rescue; but it is no use—blinded by the spray, the coast-guard'sman is swept off his feet in a second, and dragged back again by his comrades, bruised and breathless. There are no lack of brave hearts and willing hands to

dare what men may do for the assistance of their imperilled brethren. More than once, both the fishermen and coastguardsmen dash through the foam to endeavour to carry another line to the ill-fated yacht, with which to make a guide for the cradle, but only to be drawn out by their fellows half stunned.

"Bear a hand, lads, to the guy—they are signalling," shouts Fleming; and in another minute the cradle was pulled through the surf, and a couple of drenched, half-drowned sailors tumbled on the beach.

Quickly was the cradle drawn back again by those on board the yacht, and once more did it return with its living freight. They worked with a will at both ends of the guy, for it was evident that the yacht must break up in a very few minutes. Suddenly the main-mast came down with a tremendous crash, and the water poured through the schooner's side. It was a moment of terrible suspense, and for a few seconds the crowd on the beach gazed anxiously to see the result of this last blow to the doomed ship. A couple more sailors are distinguished whirled away by the waves, never again to need assistance from their fellows. But those on board the yacht rally from the shock, and once more signal the cradle is ready. Quick as thought, it is drawn through the surf—again, and yet again; and in the last freight, drenched, cold, and well-nigh spent from his exertions, is the skipper, Redman. "Only two more," he gasps—"only two," and holds up his fingers to indicate more precisely the number still left on board. "Quick, for the love of heaven!—it's a question of seconds." Even as he speaks, another tremendous sea strikes the vessel, and with a noise resembling the report of a volley of musketry, the schooner's back is broken. Wild whirl the waves over her. Shrill shrieks the gale above its victim, while the moon shines bright and placidly down upon the splintered timbers and tossing *débris*. The stern still remains firmly wedged, but in this last furious assault of the waters the rope has parted—all communication with the shore is cut off. Jim Fleming and his companions stand hopeless and dismayed. Another rocket is fired, and misses the ship—fragment of a ship, would better describe it. It is, as the skipper

rightly says, a question of seconds. The crowd are wild with excitement. Once more do men seize the life-lines, and essay to traverse the surf; it is useless, and they are but drawn back by their fellows, blinded, spent, breathless, and bruised. The brothers can be clearly discerned still clinging to the taffrail. As for Jennie, she has watched all this with such feelings as only a woman who loves, and sees her lover's life hanging by a thread, can endure. With parted lips and straining eyes she watches the cradle on its dangerous journey to and fro. Her heart beats, and once or twice she essays to speak, but the words will not come; her throat is parched, and her tongue refuses to perform its office. She grows sick with anguish, as man after man is drawn ashore, and still not he in whom her very life is bound up. She strives to distinguish him, but all in vain; she cannot make out which of those figures clinging to the wreck may be Dainty. At last she catches the skipper's words, and knows that of those two still remaining on board one is her lover. It is hard, she thinks, so many saved, but as yet not he. Her lips quiver as the rope snaps. With flashing eyes and distended nostrils, she views the gallant but unavailing efforts of the fishermen and coastguard to carry a line through the surf.

"You'll never leave them there to perish!" she cries, as the men, desisting from their exertions, look sorrowfully on, and await the faint chance that the unrescued pair may be thrown near enough to the shore to be snatched from the angry waters when the supreme moment shall arrive. "Cowards!" exclaimed Jennie, fiercely.

"No, miss, we're not that," retorts Fleming, gruffly; "and have shown it this night. We've done our best, we can do no more."

"You can!—you shall!" cried the frantic girl; "unless you mean a woman to shame you!" And Jennie seized one of the life-lines.

Even as she spoke a tremendous sea once more swept the wreck, and, when next they saw it, the two figures were no longer there.

A long wailing cry of despair broke from Jennie's lips

as she gazed anxiously into the boiling waters. Then, before any one could guess her intent, she had slipped a life-line around her and dashed into the surf. Her quick eyes had caught sight of a man struggling in the foam.

Plenty of eyes saw him now, too, though none so prompt as hers. She had made her dash just at the right time, and clutched her prize tight, just before the receding wave could withdraw it from her reach.

"Stand by the line!" thundered Jim Fleming, as a ringing cheer burst from the spectators.

Not a hand on the beach but burnt to grip that rope. As for the Captain, trembling all over with excitement, and throwing his beloved telescope on the shingle, he grasped it wildly.

"All right, my hearties!" yelled Fleming. "Bring her in, the pluckiest girl that ever trod Chesil Beach. O God, the spars!"

They were within six paces of the shore, a score of eager hands reached forward to clutch them, when a lot of the *débris* of the wreck was suddenly dashed by the waves almost on the top of them. Two or three of those who had rushed to their assistance were struck down, and with difficulty rescued by their companions. Another moment, and four figures lay stretched upon the beach—one with a broken leg, another with a frightful gash, from which the blood was streaming.

Jennie lay motionless, her lover locked tightly in her embrace, her dark hair all loose and dripping, her face pale, yet irradiated with a sweet smile; but just above the temple was the mark of a dull heavy blow. With difficulty they unloosed her clenched hands, and bore both her and her lover up to the town. Very grave and solemn was that procession—the rough men who had so lately cheered her heroism now trembled at the idea that she might never rebuke them again for want of daring. They lingered about the door of the hotel, conversing in low whispers about the events of the evening. Suddenly a wild, passionate cry broke upon the night. It was from Nance, who, seeing that her dream was accomplished, had thrown herself in an agony of grief by the side of the bed upon

which lay stretched, cold and lifeless, the one being she worshipped.

Yes, the fiat of the doctors was pronounced at last, and the loiterers outside knew that Jennie Holdershed was dead. Her gallant spirit had passed away perhaps as she could almost have wished it. She had died to save him she so loved!





CHAPTER XL.

THE LAST KISS.

THOUGH unconscious, Dainty Ellerton yet lived. The doctors could detect a faint fluttering of the pulse, an almost imperceptible movement of the heart. Plenty of help was at hand, and they never relaxed their efforts. Incessant was the application of hot bottles to the soles of his feet, of chafing, of rubbing with hot towels, etc. At last came a slight flickering of the eyelids, a low, long-drawn sigh ; gradually the heart resumed its well-nigh suspended action, and life stole slowly back through his veins. Soon they were enabled to force some strong brandy-and-water between his half-clenched teeth. A few moments more, and Dainty, slowly opening his eyes, stared vacantly around him. He did not understand it all ; he was simply conscious of having just gone through extreme agony. He had no power to think. Where he was, who were those around him, what had happened, he did not care—never, indeed, reflected, about. He had been in great pain ; he felt thoroughly exhausted. Perfectly unconcerned regarding anything else, Dainty languidly closed his eyes and slept.

“ Couldn’t be better ; he’ll do now,” agreed the doctors. “ We may leave him till to-morrow morning with clear consciences. Let him sleep as long as he will, and mind he has some strong beef-tea the instant he awakes.”

Dainty slept far into the next day. When he awoke, he raised himself on his elbow, and gazed around him with wild surprise. Where was he ? He was alone. Slowly

memory came back to him, and he recalled the events of the preceding night. He could remember the gale, the running of the Maid on Chesil Beach, the rescuing of the main part of the crew, the snapping of the rope, that fleeting moment when he and Maurice exchanged hand-grips, his brother's last words, "God forgive me, Dainty! I've slain you, myself, and our mother. To-night's work will kill her." Then came that terrible wave, and all was chaos. He had been snatched from the ravenous waters, that was evident. Where was Maurice?

But he could not think much. He was conscious of extreme weakness, and what may be termed earthquaky sensations, when he attempted to raise his head from the pillow; and then once again Dainty wondered where he was himself. He had no strength to ponder even much on that, and fell languidly back with half-closed eyes. The nervous tension of the last few weeks, conjoined with that dread stare through the portals of eternity, had told their tale. Dainty Ellerton lay prostrate, weak, feeble almost as a child.

But it was not for long that he was left alone. Speedily came ministrants of nourishment to his bedside, and Dainty was called upon to take sustenance. All curiosity as to where he was had faded from his mind. He took, or tried to take, what was given him, mechanically; it seemed to him quite natural that he should lie there and be fed. To be fed and doze represented existence to Dainty. He had ceased to trouble himself about anything else. When he did think, it was to the effect of how much happier he should be if these people would not worry him—if they would not continually rouse him to take something.

In another chamber of that small hotel, robed in her winding-sheet, lay, still and cold, the form of Jennie Holdershed. The sweet face pale and calm, the grey eyes veiled beneath the long dark lashes. They had arranged the rich brown tresses so as to hide the dull ugly mark of the blow that had bereft her of life. And by that lifeless form were two heart-broken mourners. At the side of the bed sat the Captain, in mute agony of woe. He had never fathomed his love for his niece till now. At the

foot crouched Nance, plunged into that dumb, passionate sorrow that a dog will sometimes exhibit for the loss of its master. So passed the day after the gale. Dainty, half-unconscious, in the one room, his affianced bride, buried in the sleep that knows no waking, in the next; while the Captain sits still and motionless, wrestling with his grief; and Nance ever and anon breaks the silence with her vehement sobs.

It is matter of course that the wreck of the Maid of the Mist would come to the ears of Mr. Weaver with his breakfast. He descends anxiously into the town, to glean particulars, and hears the whole story. The rescued sailors have naturally not been reticent concerning the mysterious stranger they took off the Bill, and the picking up of whom led to such a terrible catastrophe. Mr. Weaver, with the knowledge we know he possesses, is at no loss to read the whole riddle. But for once in his life he shows prudence, and keeps his conjectures carefully to himself. He is thunderstruck on hearing of Jennie's death. Yet his eyes glisten through their tears as a spectator recounts to him the history of that intrepid dash through the surf, and how she gave her own life for another's. He knows well, without asking, who was that other. Mr. Weaver had never carried heavier heart than he did as he wended his way towards the "Dolphin" at Chesiltown.

Could he see Mr. Ellerton? He was an old and intimate friend of his. No, the doctors had forbidden Mr. Ellerton to see any one. Could he see Captain Holdershed? They didn't know, they would inquire. No, Captain Holdershed was not equal to an interview with anybody. Mr. Weaver walked sorrowfully away.

But the Irishman was deeply moved, immeasurably shocked at the awful death of the bright handsome girl whom he had really been more seriously attached to than his volatile nature had ever been to any one hitherto. Then Dainty, also, was lying seriously ill, and he could not but feel for the poor old Captain, whose devoted love for his niece at bottom Mr. Weaver had not failed to penetrate. He called again and again at the "Dolphin." Soon he was admitted to an interview with the Captain,

and learnt the whole history of the wreck from his lips. Not much invention about the poor old man now as he recounts the tale of Jennie's heroism and death.

Nothing seems to rouse Dainty from his stupor. The doctors get a little uneasy at this, and decide that it would be perhaps as well that Mr. Weaver should be allowed to see him; that an interview with an old friend might awaken once more a healthy interest in what went on around him, might stimulate him to shake off the apathy that possessed him.

Not perhaps a very safe person to entrust such delicate commission to, did they but know it. Unfortunately the medical men are not aware of Mr. Weaver's excited sympathies, nor what may be the results of his unbosoming himself. The second day after the wreck, when Mr. Weaver calls, he is shown up to Dainty's room, and the impulsive Irishman is much moved at the sight of his friend's listless, haggard face.

"Dainty, dear," he exclaims, clasping the invalid's wan hand, "I'm so sorry for you."

"Tim!" mutters the other, quietly; he is in that stage of apathy when nothing astonishes us. It seemed no more extraordinary to him that Tim Weaver should appear by his bedside than any one else.

"You've been very ill, and they wouldn't let me see you before," continues Tim, "though I've asked after you very often. Sorra a wonder, near drowned as you were an' all. But you're better, Dainty, aren't you? If it hadn't been for poor Jennie, they tell me, you'd never have been here this minute."

The name arrests his attention.

"Jennie! Yes, where is Jennie? Why doesn't she come to me? Does she know all about it? And Tim, where is Maurice?"

His thoughts were coming back to him now; the listless eyes began to blaze with a feverish light, that augured ill for the doctor's experiment.

"Ah! Dainty, haven't they told you?" replied the Irishman, almost in a whisper. Already he began to see that his tongue had carried him further than was prudent.

"No. Speak! what of Jennie?" exclaimed the sick

man, raising himself in his bed. "Speak!" he continued, almost in a shriek. "What of her? Why do you say poor Jennie?"

Tim hesitated, in sore perplexity.

"Go on," said the other, fiercely. "What is it? I recollect the infernal crash! Jennie, thank God, was not there! I once intended she should be, but she was not. Are you dumb, man?"

"Oh! Dainty! Dainty!" exclaimed the Irishman, piteously, "they should have told you!"

"But they haven't. Speak, or I'll go to Upway and see for myself. Tim Weaver, if ever I served you, if ever you loved me, tell me all!" cried Dainty, in pleading tones.

"She is dead!" gasped the other. "Keep still, for heaven's sake! 'Twas she drew you out of the surf, you know, and——"

Here Tim fairly broke down, and sobbed audibly.

"Dead!" muttered Dainty; and then, with a low cry, he fell back insensible on his pillow.

Tim, thoroughly frightened, rushed from the room, and called for assistance. But Dainty Ellerton speedily recovered, and immediately asked for his friend once more. He spurned the offices of nurses or doctors, and arbitrarily demanded to see Mr. Weaver again.

"Is it true? Dead!" he asked, in hoarse voice, as Tim once more seated himself by the bedside.

A nod was the sole response.

"Tell me all about it," he exclaimed, clutching the Irishman's wrist—"quick! and everything, mind!"

All thought of his brother's fate was completely obliterated from his mind in the face of this new calamity. Rapidly, though in broken voice, did Tim Weaver tell the story of Chesil Beach, and explain to him how Jennie had given her life for his.

Dainty listened in silence; there was a stillness in the room for a few minutes, and the narrator, as he ceased, dared not even look towards the bed. Suddenly a fierce burst of passionate sobbing broke the quiet, and Dainty was weeping hysterically as a woman.

Once more Tim started from his chair, but an imperative

motion of the sufferer's hand bade him stay. At length the paroxysm wore itself out, and in a low voice Dainty asked where they had laid her. With quivering lips Tim told him that poor Jennie lay apparelled for her last journey in the adjoining chamber.

"Help me to dress," said Dainty, rising from his bed. "I must see her once again—must say farewell to her who died for me; never mind what the idiots may have told you—quick!—my head swims. If I don't do it now, it may be never."

A few minutes, and Dainty enters the chamber of death. It is vacant, apparently, save that lifeless figure that lies stretched upon the bed. Mr. Weaver reverently closes the door, and Dainty is left alone with all that remains of her who has loved him so truly. Gently he raises the covering that conceals her face, and gazes long and earnestly at the features that he knows so well. At last he bends his head, and imprints one long last kiss on the cold lips, then falls on his knees by the bedside.

How long he might have remained there, it were impossible to guess; but Nance, who, worn out with grief and watching, lies crouched in slumber at the foot of the bed, suddenly awakes. She recognizes him at once, and in the first impulse of her little Pagan heart, feels for her clasp-knife. She rises and touches him on the shoulder. He takes no heed. She shakes him roughly, and there is a savage, murderous light in her eyes as she does so. At last he raises his head; that utterly grief-stricken face awes even Nance.

"You have killed her!" she mutters, confusedly.

"And you would kill me," replies Dainty, wearily, as he catches sight of the knife. "Death, Nance, is almost too great a boon to hope for," and he drops his head once more upon his hands.

Had his face not shown such desolation of woe—had he not shown such thorough indifference to life, it was odds the girl, crazy by nature, and now half mad with grief, would have stricken him there and then. But Nance intuitively recognised a sorrow greater than her own; she said nothing, but shrank back to her old position.

Half an hour passed, and neither stirred. At the end of that time Mr. Weaver entered the room, and drew Dainty gently away.

When, next morning, they bore Jennie to her grave in Reforme churchyard, Dainty was as unconscious of all mundane affairs as his lifeless *fiancée*. He tossed to and fro on his pillow, babbling confusedly about the late events, in disjointed fashion, impossible to comprehend, unless you held the clue to it. The key-note to that tangled talk was his love for the dead girl.

There was a large muster to follow Jennie to her last resting-place. The story of the wreck had been bruited abroad, and the fishers and their wives, and the Portlanders generally, gathered in considerable numbers to pay their last tribute to the heroine who had laid down her life for her lover. For the relations that were between those two has somehow oozed out, and it is a tale that comes home to the hearts of those rough islanders. Many an eye was wet; the tear trickled down many a weather-beaten face as the grave closed over Jennie Holdershed. There are deaths that do at times strangely move the sympathies of the little world in which they occur. This was one of them.

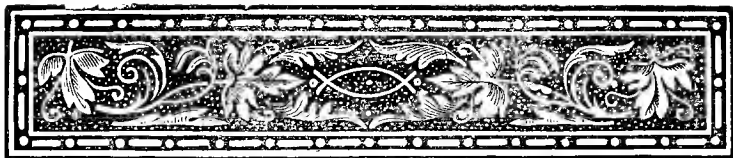
No trace of Maurice Ellerton was ever seen or heard of again. The prison authorities, though they had little doubt that he was the mysterious stranger picked up off the Bill, had no wish to inquire into the matter. That he had perished in the wreck was hardly to be questioned. He had gone—

“to the great sweet mother,
Mother and lover of men—the sea.”

His body was never recovered.

“*He shall sleep and move with the moving ships,
Change as the winds change, veer in the tide;
His lips will float on the foam of thy lips,
He shall rise with thy rising, with thee subside.*”

He has broken his bonds for aye. The ocean now is custodian of Maurice Ellerton.



CHAPTER XLI.

ROSIE HEARS OF THE WRECK.

MISS FIELDING, as we know, has been much disturbed by Dainty's unaccountable silence of late. Not a line has he written to her; and the one or two notes that his mother has received strike Rosie as peculiarly curt and distrahit. Such brief epistles, in short, as a man who, feeling himself bound to write, might pen when engaged in an important enterprise, that absorbed his every thought. She is convinced that Dainty is not lingering at Weymouth so late in the season without adequate motive—that motive, argues Miss Fielding, must be the rescue of Maurice.

Casting her eyes languidly over the local paper, three days after the gale, Rosie suddenly lights upon a paragraph, headed, "Further Particulars of the Chesil Beach Tragedy." This is the first she has heard of it. With flushed face the girl peruses the story of the destruction of the Maid of the Mist, and how the owner, Mr. Ellerton, had been snatched from the angry waters by the heroism of a woman. Very diffuse the local paper is on this point. After paying tribute to the courage of poor Jennie's achievement in glowing terms, the writer wound up with—"What still further enhances the gloom that surrounds the awful catastrophe, is the rumour that the unfortunate young lady was betrothed to the gentleman in saving whose life she so lamentably sacrificed her own."

Again and again does Miss Fielding read over this account. She only partially comprehends it. There is no

mention whatever of Maurice. But what could have induced the yacht to linger so long in such a dangerous place as the West Bay, with a palpable sou'-west gale rising, is strongly commented upon. A floating report that her boat was away for some undefined purpose in the neighbourhood of the Bill, a whisper that the picking up of a mysterious stranger in that vicinity caused the fatal delay—all this is delicately alluded to. Then that last paragraph, what can that mean? Little by little Rosie pieces the thing together in her own mind, and gradually arrives at a very fair approximation to the truth. She sees that four or five lives were lost, and it strikes her sadly that Maurice must be among those that had perished. Two things she is clear about—that she must go at once to Weymouth, and that Mrs. Ellerton must not get sight of that paper till she returns.

Telling her aunt that she is off on a long sketching expedition, and not likely to be in till dinner-time, Rosie betakes herself to the station, and very soon finds herself in Weymouth. She goes to the pier in the first instance. None so likely to know the particulars of this affair as the boatmen, she thinks. Miss Fielding is right. She soon gleans from their lips not only what she already knows, but that Mr. Ellerton, the owner of the luckless schooner, lies dangerously ill at Chesiltown. Does the lady want to go there? inquire the boatmen. Yes, Miss Fielding wants to go there. She is a near relative of Mr. Ellerton, and has come over from Bournemouth in consequence of what she had seen in the papers. Miss Fielding falls into the hands of a couple of ancient but mendacious mariners, who affirm stoutly that the speediest way to Chesiltown is by water.

"Take me there, and conduct me to this inn you mention, and you will be well paid," replied Rosie, briefly.

The men work with a will, the wind is favourable, and Miss Fielding soon finds herself, under the guidance of one of her myrmidons, at the door of the "Dolphin." There she tells her errand, and the landlady of that hostelry receives her with much *empressement*. The poor gentleman is so ill, she says, that it is quite a relief to see any of his own people. Not but that he has friends; there is Mr.

Weaver, of the —th, quartered in the Verne, you know, Miss; he is here half-a-dozen times a day, and Captain Holdershed, he looks in to ask after him. He says he can't bear to see him yet; which it's only what might be expected, and his own niece—poor thing!—drowned all along of saving him, you know. We do our best for him, poor fellow, but what I say is this, his own people ought to know about it, and it's a load off my mind now you've come, Miss."

Stopping the loquacious landlady with some little difficulty, Miss Fielding desired, in the first place, to see the sick man. She was shown into his room. Dainty was in a fitful doze, tossing wearily from side to side on his pillow, and occasionally giving vent to incoherent murmurs. Rosie stepped lightly to the bedside, and laid her hand softly on the sufferer's brow. She recognized at once the fever that consumed him. Leaving the chamber quietly, Miss Fielding once more summoned the landlady.

"I shall want two rooms here to-morrow," she said. "You must manage it as best you can. Mr. Ellerton is very ill, and it is necessary that he should have careful nursing. His mother and I will arrive early to-morrow to take charge of him. For the present, good-bye."

This much of her mission accomplished, Rosie sped back to Bournemouth. Sadly she reflected on the task that lay before her—sorrowfully and tenderly she mused over what had probably been the fate of Maurice. It was true she had but sheer conjecture to go upon, when she pictured him as one of those who had perished on Chesil Beach; and then Rosie gave a great sigh of relief as she remembered that she was in no wise bound to communicate such misgivings to Mrs. Ellerton. Of course not—if it was true, the blow should at all events fall later—it was not in her province to announce poor Maurice's death, when she had but such slender data to go upon; the story of the mysterious stranger picked up at the Bill might be a mere newspaper *canard*. At all events, she neither knew positively that Maurice had been on board, nor, supposing that he were, that he had perished. And yet in her heart Rosie felt that it was so.

She contrived to get home before Mrs. Ellerton had

begun to reel uneasy at her absence; and after tea, curling herself up at her aunt's feet on a low foot-stool, Rosie told the story of the shipwreck in her own fashion; and notwithstanding the pang that concluding paragraph in the local paper had cost her, Rosie did enthusiastic justice to poor Jennie Holdershed's memory. She had heard much on that subject during her visit to Weymouth, and Rosie was too large-hearted to withhold her tribute of admiration for the dead girl's deed of daring.

As for Mrs. Ellerton, her colour came and went during her niece's narration, but she mastered her emotion by a rare effort of self-control, as she said at last, in somewhat quavering tones:

"Very ill, you say, dear. We must go to him at once, Rosie. I cannot lose both my boys."

"Of course we must go to him, my mother," rejoined Rosie, with a gaiety she was very far from feeling. "I made all arrangements to-day, and we must be off by the first train in the morning. Dainty's very ill, you know, but then when you and I are there to stuff him with jellies and beef-tea, and pet him—ah, my mother, trust you for that—we shall very soon have him round again."

The next day saw Mrs. Ellerton and Rosie established at the Dolphin Inn, Chesiltown. The accommodation was somewhat rude, but what recked they of that? They took possession of Dainty, and, thanks to their unwearied care, at the end of a week he was pronounced out of danger. By that time, too, Miss Fielding was in full possession of what had been his relations with Jennie Holdershed. It is easy to understand how she arrived at that knowledge, when one reflects that Mr. Weaver was a constant visitor to the sick man's room. Tim required little drawing-out on Miss Fielding's part. He volunteered his information, and dwelt much on the strong attachment that had subsisted between those two, and the charms of her who was now no more.

And Rosie was too sad not to take an interest in this forrowful love-story. Poor Dainty, how she did pity him! he had played his last card—what a blank the game of He must appear to him in the future! The brother he had risked so much for—the girl who held his heart—

both dead! What was he to look forward to? It would seem a wearisome world to him, she thought, when he got well enough to face it again.

A few days more, and they bear away the invalid to Bournemouth. Very still and silent is Dainty, responding to all their efforts to amuse him by a sad faint smile.

"It's no use, mother dear," he said gently. "I shall get well in time, but I'm fairly broken down now. If you'd known my darling, you would understand what sorrow it is I have to face. Poor Maurice, too—ah, mother, it's been a sore time for all of us."

Mrs. Ellerton has of course been made acquainted with the melancholy end of her eldest son. Many a tear has she shed in the solitude of the night-watches over the miserable ending of that son whom she had for so many years loved and looked up to. But the mother's mind is, on the whole, easier now. She can better bear to picture him cold and still beneath the restless waves than a prisoner at Portland.

But in many a farm-house, in many a fisherman's cabin, is the story told yet of how Jennie died on Chesil Beach to save the man she loved. Many a Portland lass to this day feels her eye grow moist as one of the elders tells the tale of how the Maid of the Mist perished.





EPILOGUE.

FOUR years are gone and past; the turf grows thick over Jennie's grave in Reforne churchyard, and Maurice Ellerton's bones lie bleaching fathoms deep beneath the waters. Captain Holdershed has followed his niece, and also laid down his grizzled head for ever. Nor'-westers, visions, or infirmity of temper, shall never trouble him more. The main-spring of his life broke upon Chesil Beach that night Jennie perished in the angry surf. There was no rousing the old mariner after that—even the loss of the famous telescope, never seen since he threw it so recklessly on the shingle, failed to stir him from his apathy. As Mr. Weaver remarked, "The ould gentleman had even lost his capacity for cursing." He just "dwined away," as they said. Though losing both his love for Dibdin and taste for strong waters, he faintly quavered a stanza of Tom Bowling one evening, said he felt very weary, and the next morning, when they went to awaken him, the old mariner was "gone aloft."

It is a lovely summer's night—the moon shines brightly over Weymouth Bay, the tide is in, and the sea softly kisses the parapet of the esplanade. All the little watering-place is abroad. The strolling singers roam from pitch to pitch with jingling harp and violoncello, discoursing, in somewhat discordant tones, the minstrelsie of the seaside. The benches on the promenade are thronged with loungers. They who pace up and down are necessitated almost to thread their way. The Weymouth season has set fairly

in, and the lodging-house keepers must be driving a roaring trade.

There is a group coming slowly down the well-kept gravel walk now, that many a passer-by involuntarily turns to look round at. In a bath-chair is an elderly lady, with soft snowy hair and sweet blue eyes. She is attended by a young man and a young lady, both striking in their way. They walk mostly together, and seem earnest in their talk ; and when they get a little in advance of the chair, a smile plays about that elderly lady's lips. Mrs. Ellerton trusts that the dream of her life will at length be realized, and that Dainty and Rosie may come together at last.

"It must be very sad for you, Dainty," said the girl, softly, "this coming back to the scene of so much misery. I wonder, when the mother said she should like to see Weymouth again, that you had courage to face it?"

"Time mellows all things, Rosie ; and, to tell the truth, I rather like the idea. I have visited several places hallowed to me by old memories—the Wishing Well at Upway, and a grave in Reforne churchyard ; you—you can guess who's."

He said this in quiet, absent tones, and with a pre-occupied air.

"Yes, I understand," she replied. "You must take me there some day. I also should like to see that grave."

"We will go some afternoon. I am haunted with the old memories, Rosie. Sad, but no longer sorrowful, if you can comprehend such an anomaly."

"I think I do," said Miss Fielding, slowly.

No further word passed between them, but those two understood each other marvellously well.

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